

Erskine Payne

The Eye of Dread



Payne Erskine

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BOOK ONE

CHAPTER I

BETTY

Two whip-poor-wills were uttering their insistent note, hidden somewhere among the thick foliage of the maple and basswood trees that towered above the spring down behind the house where the Ballards lived. The sky in the west still glowed with amber light, and the crescent moon floated like a golden boat above the horizon's edge. The day had been unusually warm, and the family were all gathered on the front porch in the dusk. The lamps within were unlighted, and the evening wind blew the white muslin curtains out and in through the opened windows. The porch was low,—only a step from the ground,—and the grass of the dooryard felt soft and cool to the bare feet of the children.

In front and all around lay the garden—flowers and fruit quaintly intermingled. Down the long path to the gate, where three roads met, great bunches of peonies lifted white blossoms—luminously white in the moonlight; and on either side rows of currant bushes cast low, dark shadows, and here and there dwarf crab-apple trees tossed pale, scented flowers above them. In the dusky evening light the iris flowers showed frail and iridescent against the dark shadows under the bushes.

The children chattered quietly at their play, as if they felt a mystery around them, and small Betty was sure she saw fairies dancing on the iris flowers when the light breeze stirred them; but of this she said nothing, lest her practical older sister should drop a scornful word of unbelief, a thing Betty shrank from and instinctively avoided. Why should she be told there were no such things as fairies and goblins and pigwidgeons, when one might be at that very moment dancing at her elbow and hear it all?

So Betty wagged her curly golden head, wise with the wisdom of childhood, and went her own ways and thought her own thoughts. As for the strange creatures of wondrous power that peopled the earth, and the sky, and the streams, she knew they were there. She could almost see them, could almost feel them and hear them, even though they were hidden from mortal sight.

Did she not often go when the sun was setting and climb the fence behind the barn under the great locust and silver-leaf poplar trees, where none could see her, and watch the fiery griffins in the west? Could she not see them flame and flash, their wings spreading far out across the sky in fantastic flight, or drawn close and folded about them in hues of purple and crimson and gold? Could she not see the flying mist-women flinging their floating robes of softest pink and palest green around their slender limbs, and trailing them delicately across the deepening sky?

Had she not heard the giants—nay, seen them—driving their terrible steeds over the tumbled clouds, and rolling them smooth with noise of thunder, under huge rolling machines a thousand times bigger than that Farmer Hopkins used to crush the clods in his wheat field in the spring? Had she not seen the flashes of fire dart through the heavens, struck by the hoofs of the giants' huge beasts? Ah! She knew! If Martha would only listen to her, she could show her some of these true things and stop her scoffing.

Lured by these mysteries, Betty made short excursions into the garden away from the others, peering among the shadows, and gazing wide-eyed into the clusters of iris flowers above which night moths fluttered softly and silently. Maybe there were fairies there. Three could ride at once on the

back of a devil's riding horse, she knew, and in the daytime they rode the dragon flies, two at a time; they were so light it was nothing for the great green and gold, big-eyed dragon flies to carry two.

Betty knew a place below the spring where the maidenhair fern grew thick and spread out wide, perfect fronds on slender brown stems, shading fairy bowers; and where taller ferns grew high and leaned over like a delicate fairy forest; and where the wild violets grew so thick you could not see the ground beneath them, and the grass was lush and long like fine green hair, and crept up the hillside and over the roots of the maple and basswood trees. Here lived the elves; she knew them well, and often lay with her head among the violets, listening for the thin sound of their elfin fiddles. Often she had drowsed the summer noon in the coolness, unheeding the dinner call, until busy Martha roused her with the sisterly scolding she knew she deserved and took in good part.

Now as Betty crept cautiously about, peering and hoping with a half-fearing expectation, a sweet, threadlike wail trembled out toward her across the moonlit and shadowed space. Her father was tuning his violin. Her mother sat at his side, hushing Bobby in her arms. Betty could hear the sound of her rockers on the porch floor. Now the plaintive call of the violin came stronger, and she hastened back to curl up at her father's feet and listen. She closed her vision-seeing eyes and leaned against her father's knee. He felt the gentle pressure of his little daughter's head and liked it.

All the long summer day Betty's small feet had carried her on numberless errands for young and old, and as the season advanced she would be busier still. This Betty well knew, for she was old enough to remember other summers, several of them, each bringing an advancing crescendo of work. But oh, the happy days! For Betty lived in a world all her own, wherein her play was as real as her work, and labor was turned by her imaginative little mind into new forms of play, and although night often found her weary—too tired to lie quietly in her bed sometimes—the line between the two was never in her thoughts distinctly drawn.

To-night Betty's conscience was troubling her a little, for she had done two naughty things, and the pathetic quality of her father's music made her wish with all the intensity of her sensitive soul that she might confess to some one what she had done, but it was all too peaceful and sweet now to tell her mother of naughty things, and, anyway, she could not confess before the whole family, so she tried to repent very hard and tell God all about it. Somehow it was always easier to tell God about things; for she reasoned, if God was everywhere and knew everything, then he knew she had been bad, and had seen her all the time, and all she need do was to own up to it, without explaining everything in words, as she would have to do to her mother.

Brother Bobby's bare feet swung close to her cheek as they dangled from her mother's knee, and she turned and kissed them, first one and then the other, with eager kisses. He stirred and kicked out at her fretfully.

"Don't wake him, dear," said her mother.

Then Betty drew up her knees and clasped them about with her arms, and hid her face on them while she repented very hard. Mother had said that very day that she never felt troubled about the baby when Betty had care of him, and that very day she had recklessly taken him up into the barn loft, climbing behind him and guiding his little feet from one rung of the perpendicular ladder to another, teaching him to cling with clenched hands to the rounds until she had landed him in the loft. There she had persuaded him he was a swallow in his nest, while she had taken her fill of the delight of leaping from the loft down into the bay, where she had first tossed enough hay to make a soft lighting place for the twelve-foot leap.

Oh, the joy of it—flying through the air! If she could only fly up instead of down! Every time she climbed back into the loft she would stop and cuddle the little brother and toss hay over him and tell him he was a baby bird, and she was the mother bird, and must fly away and bring him nice worms. She bade him look up to the rafters above and see the mother birds flying out and in, while the little birds just sat still in their nests and opened their mouths. So Bobby sat still, and when she returned, obediently opened his mouth; but alas! he wearied of his rôle in the play, and at last crept to

the very edge of the loft at a place where there was no hay spread beneath to break his fall; and when Betty looked up and saw his sweet baby face peering down at her over the edge, her heart stopped beating. How wildly she called for him to wait for her to come to him! She promised him all the dearest of her treasures if he would wait until “sister” got there.

Now, as she sat clasping her knees, her little body grew all trembling and weak again as she lived over the terrible moment when she had reached him just in time to drag him back from the edge, and to cuddle and caress him, until he lifted up his voice and wept, not because he was in the least troubled or hurt, but because it seemed to be the right thing to do.

Then she gave him the pretty round comb that held back her hair, and he promptly straightened it and broke it; and when she reluctantly brought him back to dinner—how she had succeeded in getting him down from the loft would make a chapter of diplomacy—her mother reproved her for allowing him to take it, and lapped the two pieces and wound them about with thread, and told her she must wear the broken comb after this. She was glad—glad it was broken—and she had treasured it so—and glad that her mother had scolded her; she wished she had scolded harder instead of speaking words of praise that cut her to the heart. Oh, oh, oh! If he had fallen over, he would be dead now, and she would have killed him! Thus she tortured herself, and repented very hard.

The other sin she had that day committed she felt to be a double sin, because she knew all the time it was wrong and did it deliberately. When she went out with the corn meal to feed the little chicks and fetch in the new-laid eggs, she carried, concealed under her skirt, a small, squat book of Robert Burns’ poems. These poems she loved; not that she understood them, but that the rhythm pleased her, and the odd words and half-comprehended phrases stirred her imagination.

So, after feeding the chicks and gathering the eggs, she did not return to the house, but climbed instead up into the top of the silver-leaf poplar behind the barn, and sat there long, swaying with the swaying tree top and reading the lines that most fascinated her and stirred her soul, until she forgot she must help Martha with the breakfast dishes—forgot she must carry milk to the neighbor’s—forgot she must mind the baby and peel the potatoes for dinner. It was so delightful to sway and swing and chant the rhythmic lines over and over that almost she forgot she was being bad, and Martha had done the things she ought to have done, and the baby cried himself to sleep without her, and lay with the pathetic tear marks still on his cheeks, but her tired mother had only looked reproachfully at her and had not said one word. Oh, dear! If she could only be a good girl! If only she might pass one day being good all day long with nothing to regret!

Now with the wailing of the violin her soul grew hungry and sad, and a strange, unchildish fear crept over her, a fear of the years to come—so long and endless they would be, always coming, coming, one after another; and here she was, never to stop living, and every day doing something that she ought not and every evening repenting it—and her father might stop loving her, and her sister might stop loving her, and her little brother might stop loving her, and Bobby might die—and even her mother might die or stop loving her, and she might grow up and marry a man who forgot after a while to love her—and she might be very poor—even poorer than they were now, and have to wash dishes every day and no one to help her—until at last she could bear the sadness no longer, and could not repent as hard as she ought, there where she could not go down on her knees and just cry and cry. So she slipped away and crept in the darkness to her own room, where her mother found her half an hour later on her knees beside the bed fast asleep. She lovingly undressed the limp, weary little girl, lifted her tenderly and laid her curly head on the pillow, and kissed her cheek with a repentant sigh of her own, regretting that she must lay so many tasks on so small a child.

CHAPTER II

WATCHING THE BEES

Father Ballard walked slowly up the path from the garden, wiping his brow, for the heat was oppressive. "Mary, my dear, I see signs of swarming. The bees are hanging out on that hive under the Tolman Sweet. Where's Betty?"

"She's down cellar churning, but she can leave. Bobby's getting fretful, anyway, and she can take him under the trees and watch the bees and amuse him. Betty!" Mary Ballard went to the short flight of steps leading to the paved basement, dark and cool: "Betty, father wants you to watch the bees, dear. Find Bobby. He's so still I'm afraid he's out at the currant bushes again, and he'll make himself sick. Keep an eye on the hive under the Tolman Sweet particularly, dear."

Gladly Betty bounded up the steps and darted away to find the baby who was still called the baby by reason of his being the last arrival, although he was nearly three, and an active little tyrant at that. Watching the bees was Betty's delight. Minding the baby, lolling under the trees reading her books, gazing up into the great branches, and all the time keeping an eye on the hives scattered about in the garden,—nothing could be pleasanter.

Naturally Betty could not understand all she read in the books she carried out from the library, for purely children's books were very few in those days. The children of the present day would be dismayed were they asked to read what Betty pondered over with avidity and loved. Her father's library was his one extravagance, even though the purchase of books was always a serious matter, each volume being discussed and debated about, and only obtained after due preparation by sundry small economies.

As for worldly possessions, the Ballards had started out with nothing at all but their own two hands, and, as assets, well-equipped brains, their love for each other, a fair amount of thrift, and a large share of what Mary Ballard's old Grannie Sherman used to designate as "gumption." Exactly what she intended should be understood by the word it would be hard to say, unless it might be the faculty with which, when one thing proved to be no longer feasible as a shift toward progress and the making of a living for an increasing family, they were enabled to discover other means and work them out to a productive conclusion.

Thus, when times grew hard under the stress of the Civil War, and the works of art representing many hours of Bertrand Ballard's keenest effort lay in his studio unpurchased, and even carefully created portraits, ordered and painstakingly painted, were left on his hands, unclaimed and unpaid for, he quietly turned his attention to his garden, saying, "People can live without pictures, but they must eat."

So he obtained a few of the choicest of the quickly produced small fruits and vegetables and flowers, and soon had rare and beautiful things to sell. His clever hands, which before had made his own stretchers for his canvases, and had fashioned and gilded with gold leaf the frames for his own paintings, now made trellises for his vines and boxes for his fruits, and when the price of sugar climbed to the very top of the gamut, he created beehives on new models, and bought a book on bee culture; ere long he had combs of delicious honey to tempt the lovers of sweets.

But how came Bertrand Ballard away out in Wisconsin in a country home, painting pictures for people who knew little or nothing of art, and cared not to know more, raising fruits and keeping bees for the means to live? Ah, that is another story, and to tell it would make another book; suffice it to say that for love of a beautiful woman, strong and wise and sweet, he had followed her farmer father out into the newer west from old New York State.

There, frail in health and delicate and choice in his tastes, but brave in spirit, he took up the battle of the weak with life, and fought it like a strong man, valiantly and well. And where got he his strength? How are the weak ever made strong? Through strength of love—the inward fire that makes

great the soul, while consuming the dross of false values and foolish estimates—from the merry heart that could laugh through any failure, and most of all from the beautiful hand, supple and workful, and gentle and forceful, that lay in his.

But this is not the story of Bertrand Ballard, except incidentally as he and his family play their part in the drama that centers in the lives of two lads, one of whom—Peter Craigmile, Junior—comes now swinging up the path from the front gate, where three roads meet, brave in his new uniform of blue, with lifted head, and eyes grave and shining with a kind of solemn elation.

“Bertrand, here comes Peter Junior in a new uniform,” Mary Ballard called to her husband, who was working at a box in which he meant to fit glass sides for an aquarium for the edification of the little ones. He came quickly out from his workroom, and Mary rose from her seat and pushed her mending basket one side, and together they walked down the path to meet the youth.

“Peter Junior, have you done it? Oh, I’m sorry!”

“Why, Mary! why, Mary! I’m astonished! Not sorry?” Bertrand took the boy’s hand in both his own and looked up in his eyes, for the lad was tall, much taller than his friend. “I would go myself if I only had the strength and were not near-sighted.”

“Thank the Lord!” said his wife, fervently.

“Why, Mary—Mary—I’m astonished!” he said again. “Our country—”

“Yes, ‘Our Country’ is being bled to death,” she said, taking the boy’s hand in hers for a moment; and, turning, they walked back to the house with the young volunteer between them. “No, I’m not reconciled to having our young men go down there and die by the thousands from disease and bullets and in prisons. It’s wrong! I say war is iniquitous, and the issues, North or South, are not worth it. Peter, I had hoped you were too young. Why did you?”

“I couldn’t help it, Mrs. Ballard. The call for fifty thousand more came, and father gave his consent; and, anyway, they are taking a younger set now than at first.”

“Yes, and soon they’ll take an older set, and then they’ll take the small and frail and near-sighted ones, and then—” She stopped suddenly, with a contrite glance at her husband’s face. He hated to be small and frail and near-sighted. She stepped round to his side and put her hand in his. “I’m thankful you are, Bertrand,” she said quietly. “You’ll stay to tea with us, won’t you, Peter? We’ll have it out of doors.”

“Yes, I’ll stay—thank you. It may be the last time, and mother—I came to see if you’d go up home and see mother, Mrs. Ballard. I kind of thought you’d think as father and Mr. Ballard do about it, and I thought you might be able to help mother to see it that way, too. You see, mother—she—I always thought you were kind of strong and would see things sort of—well—big, you know, more—as we men do.” He held his head high and looked off as he spoke.

She exchanged a half-smiling glance with her husband, and their hands clasped tighter. “Maybe, though—if you feel this way—you can’t help mother—but what shall I do?” The big boy looked wistfully down at her.

“I may not be able to help her to see things you want, Peter Junior. Maybe she would be happier in seeing things her own way; but I can sympathize with her. Perhaps I can help her to hope for the best, and anyway—we can—just talk it over.”

“Thank you, Mrs. Ballard, thank you. I don’t care how she sees it, if—if—she’ll only be happier—and—give her consent. I can’t bear to go away without that; but if she won’t give it, I must go anyway,—you know.”

“Yes,” she said, smiling, “I suppose we women have to be forced sometimes, or we never would allow some things to be done. You enlisted first and then went to her for her consent? Yes, you are a man, Peter Junior. But I tell you, if you were my son, I would never give my consent—nor have it forced from me—still—I would love you better for doing this.”

“My love, your inconsistency is my joy,” said her husband, as she passed into the house and left them together.

The sun still shone hotly down, but the shadows were growing longer, and Betty left baby asleep under the Harvest apple tree where she had been staying patiently during the long, warm hours, and sat at her father's feet on the edge of the porch, where apparently she was wholly occupied in tracing patterns with her bare toes in the sand of the path. Now and then she ran out to the Harvest apple tree and back, her golden head darting among the green shrubbery like a sunbeam. She wished to do her full duty by the bees and the baby, and at the same time hear all the talk of the older ones, and watch the fascinating young soldier in his new uniform.

As bright as the sunbeam, and as silent, she watched and listened. Her heart beat fast with excitement, as it often did these days, when she heard them talk of the war and the men who went away, perhaps never to return, or to return with great glory. Now here was Peter Junior going. He already had his beautiful new uniform, and he would march and drill and carry a gun, and halt and present arms, along with the older men she had seen in the great camp out on the high bluffs which overlooked the wide, sweeping, rushing, willful Wisconsin River.

Oh, if she were only a man and as old as Peter Junior, she would go with him; but it was very grand to know him even. Why was she a girl? If God had only asked her which she would rather be when he had made her out of dust, she would have told him to make her a man, so she might be a soldier. It was not fair. There was Bobby; he would be a man some day, and he could ride on a large black horse like the knights of old, and go to wars, and rescue people, and do deeds of arms. What deeds of arms were, she little knew, but it was something very strong and wonderful that only knights and soldiers did.

Betty heaved a deep sigh, and put out her hand and softly touched Peter Junior's trousers. He thought it was the kitten purring about. No, God had not treated her fairly. Now she must grow up and be only a woman, and wash dishes, and sweep and dust, and get very tired, and wear dresses—and oh, dear! But then perhaps God had to do that way, for if he had given everybody a choice, everybody would choose to be men, and there would be no women to mind the home and take care of the little children, and it would be a very sad kind of world, as she had often heard her father say. Perhaps God had to do with them as Peter Junior had done with his mother when he enlisted first and asked her consent afterwards; just make them girls, and then try to convince them afterwards that it was a fine thing to be a girl. She wished she were Bobby instead of Betty—but then—Bobby might not have liked that.

She glanced wistfully at the sleeping child and saw him toss his arms about, and knew she ought to be there to sway a green branch over him to keep the little gnats and flies from bothering him and waking him; and the bees might swarm and no one see them.

“Father, is it three o'clock yet?”

“Yes, deary, why?”

“Goody! The bees won't swarm now, will they? Will you bring Bobby in, father?”

“He is very well there; we won't disturb him.”

Peter Junior looked down on the little girl, so full of vitality and life and inspiration, so vibrant with enthusiasm, and saw her vaguely as a slightly disturbing element, but otherwise of little moment in the world's economy. His thoughts were on greater things.

Betty accepted her father's decision without protest, as she accepted most things,—a finality to be endured and made the best of,—so she continued to run back and forth between the sleeping child and the porch, thereby losing much interesting dialogue,—all about camps and fighting and scout duty,—until at last her mother returned and with a glance at her small daughter's face said:—

“Father, will you bring baby in now and put him in his cradle? Betty has had him nearly all day.” And father went. Oh, beautiful mother! How did she know!

Then Betty settled herself at Peter Junior's feet and looked up in his eyes gravely. “What will you be, now you are a soldier?” she asked.

“Why, a soldier.”

“No, I mean, will you be a general—or a flag carrier—or will you drum? I’d be a general if I were you—or else a drummer. I think you would be very handsome for a general.”

Peter Junior threw back his head and laughed. It was the first time he had laughed that day, and yet he was both proud and happy. “Would you like to be a soldier?”

“Yes.”

“But you might be killed, or have your leg shot off—or—”

“I know. So might you—but you would go, anyway—wouldn’t you?”

“Certainly.”

“Well, then you understand how I feel. I’d like to be a man, and go to war, and ‘Have a part to tear a cat in,’ too.”

“What’s that? What’s that? Mary, do you hear that?” said her father, resuming his seat at Peter’s side, and hearing her remark.

“Why, father, wouldn’t you? You know you’d like to go to war. I heard what you said to mother, and, anyway—I’d just like to be a man and ‘Have a part to tear a cat in,’ the way men have.”

Bertrand Ballard looked down and patted his little daughter’s head, then caught her up and placed her on his knee. He realized suddenly that his child was an entity unfathomed, separate from himself, working out her own individuality almost without guidance, except such as he and his Mary were unconsciously giving to her by their daily acts and words.

“What books are those you have there? Don’t you know you mustn’t take father’s Shakespeare out and leave it on the grass?”

Betty laughed. “How did you know I had Shakespeare?”

“Didn’t you say you ‘Would like a part to tear a cat in’?”

“Oh, have you read ‘Midsummer Night’s Dream’?” She lifted her head from his bosom and eyed him gravely a moment, then snuggled comfortably down again. “But then, I suppose you have read everything.” Her father and Peter both laughed.

“Were you reading ‘Midsummer Night’s Dream’ out there?”

“No, I’ve read that lots of times—long ago. I’m reading ‘The Merry Wives of Windsor’ now.”

“Mary, Mary, do you hear this? I think it’s time our Betty had a little supervision in her reading.”

Mary Ballard came to the door from the tea table where she had been arranging her little set of delicate china, her one rare treasure and inheritance. “Yes, I knew she was reading—whatever she fancied, but I thought I wouldn’t interfere—not yet. I have so little time, for one thing, and, anyway, I thought she might browse a bit. She’s like a calf in rare pastures, and I don’t think she understands enough to do her harm—or much good, either. Those things slide off from her like water off a duck’s back.”

Betty looked anxiously up at her mother. What things was she missing? She must read them all over again.

“What else have you out there, Betty?” asked her father.

Betty dropped her head shamefacedly. She never knew when she was in the right and when wrong. Sometimes the very things which seemed most right to her were most wrong. “That’s ‘Paradise Lost.’ It was an old book, father. There was a tear in the back when I took it down. I like to read about Satan. I like to read about the mighty hosts and the angels and the burning lake. Is that hell? I was pretending if the bees swarmed that they would be the mighty host of bad angels falling out of heaven.”

Again Peter flung back his head and laughed. He looked at the child with new interest, but Betty did not smile back at him. She did not like being laughed at.

“It’s true,” she said; “they did fall out of heaven in a swarm, and it was like over at High Knob on the river bank, only a million times higher, because they were so long falling. ‘From morn till noon they fell, from noon till dewy eve.’” Betty looked off into space with half-closed eyes. She was seeing

them fall. "It was a long time to be in suspense, wasn't it, father?" Then every one laughed. Even mother joined in. She was putting the last touches to the tea table.

"Mary, my dear, I think we'd better take a little supervision of the child's reading—I do, really."

The gate at the end of the long path to the house clicked, and another lad came swinging up the walk, slightly taller than Peter Junior, but otherwise enough like him in appearance to be his own brother. He was not as grave as Peter, but smiled as he hailed them, waving his cap above his head. He also wore the blue uniform, and it was new.

"Hallo, Peter! You here?"

"Of course I'm here. I thought you were never coming."

"You did?"

Betty sprang from her father's lap and ran to meet him. She slipped her hand in his and hopped along at his side. "Oh, Rich! Are you going, too? I wish I were you."

He lifted the child to a level with his face and kissed her, then set her on her feet again. "Never wish that, Betty. It would spoil a nice little girl."

"I'm not such a nice little girl. I—I—love Satan—and they're going to—to—supervise my reading." She clung to his hand and nodded her head with finality. He swung her along, making her take long leaps as they walked.

"You love Satan? I thought you loved me!"

"It's the same thing, Rich," said Peter Junior, with a grin.

Bertrand had gone to the kitchen door. "Mary, my love, here's Richard Kildene." She entered the living room, carrying a plate of light, hot biscuit, and hurried out to Richard, greeting him warmly—even lovingly.

"Bertrand, won't you and the boys carry the table out to the garden?" she suggested. "Open both doors and take it carefully. It will be pleasanter here in the shade."

The young men sprang to do her bidding, and the small table was borne out under the trees, the lads enumerating with joy the articles of Mary Ballard's simple menu.

"Hot biscuits and honey! My golly! Won't we wish for this in about two months from now?" said Richard.

"Cream and caraway cookies!" shouted Peter Junior, turning back to the porch to help Bertrand carry the chairs. "Of course we'll be wishing for this before long, but that's part of soldiering."

"We're not looking forward to a well-fed, easy time of it, so we'll just make the best of this to-night, and eat everything in sight," said Richard.

Bertrand preferred to change the subject. "This is some of our new white clover honey," he said. "I took it from that hive over there last evening, and they've been working all day as if they had had new life given them. All bees want is a lot of empty space for storing honey."

Richard followed Mrs. Ballard into the kitchen for the tea. "Where are the other children?" he asked.

"Martha and Jamie are spending a week with my mother and father. They love to go there, and mother—and father, also, seem never to have enough of them. Baby is still asleep, and I must waken him, too, or he won't sleep to-night. I hung a pail of milk over the spring to keep it cool, and the butter is there also—and the Dutch cheese in a tin box. Can you—wait, I'd better go with you. We'll leave the tea to steep a minute."

They passed through the house and down toward the spring house under the maple and basswood trees at the back, walking between rows of currant bushes where the fruit hung red.

"I hate to leave all this—maybe forever," said the boy. The corners of his mouth drooped a little, and he looked down at Mary Ballard with a tender glint in his deep blue eyes. His eyes were as blue as the lake on a summer's evening, and they were shaded by heavy dark brown lashes, almost black. His brows and hair were the same deep brown. Peter Junior's were a shade lighter, and his hair more

curling. It was often a matter of discussion in the village as to which of the boys was the handsomer. That they were both fine-looking lads was always conceded.

Mary Ballard turned toward him impulsively. "Why did you do this, Richard? Why? I can't feel that this fever for war is right. It is terrible. We are losing the best blood in the land in a wicked war." She took his two hands in hers, and her eyes filled. "When we first came here, your mother was my dearest friend. You never knew her, but I loved her—and her loss was much to me. Richard, why didn't you consult us?"

"I hadn't any one but you and your husband to care. Oh, Aunt Hester loves me, of course, and is awfully good to me—but the Elder—I always feel somehow as if he expects me to go to the bad. He never had any use for my father, I guess. Was my father—was—he no good? Don't mind telling me the truth: I ought to know."

"Your father was not so well known here, but he was, in Bertrand's estimation, a royal Irish gentleman. We both liked him; no one could help it. Never think hardly of him."

"Why has he never cared for me? Why have I never known him?"

"There was a quarrel—or—some unpleasantness between your uncle and him; it's an old thing."

Richard's lip quivered an instant, then he drew himself up and smiled on her, then he stooped and kissed her. "Some of us must go; we can't let this nation be broken up. Some men must give their lives for it; and I'm one of those who ought to go, for I have no one to mourn for me. Half the class has enlisted."

"I venture to say you suggested it, too?"

"Well—yes."

"And Peter Junior was the first to follow you?"

"Well, yes! I'm sorry—because of Aunt Hester—but we always do pull together, you know. See here, let's not think of it in this way. There are other ways. Perhaps I'll come back with straps on my shoulders and marry Betty some day."

"God grant you may; that is, if you come back as you left us. You understand me? The same boy?"

"I do and I will," he said gravely.

That was a happy hour they spent at the evening meal, and many an evening afterwards, when hardship and weariness had made the lads seem more rugged and years older, they spoke of it and lived it over.

CHAPTER III

A MOTHER'S STRUGGLE

"Come, Lady, come. You're slow this morning." Mary Ballard drove a steady, well-bred, chestnut mare with whom she was on most friendly terms. Usually her carryall was filled with children, for she kept no help, and when she went abroad, she must perforce take the children with her or spend an unquiet hour or two while leaving them behind. This morning she had left the children at home, and carried in their stead a basket of fruit and flowers on the seat beside her. "Come, Lady, come; just hurry a little." She touched the mare with the whip, a delicate reminder to haste, which Lady assumed to be a fly and treated as such with a switch of her tail.

The way seemed long to Mary Ballard this morning, and the sun beating down on the parched fields made the air quiver with heat. The unpaved road was heavy with dust, and the mare seemed to drag her feet through it unnecessarily as she jogged along. Mary was anxious and dreaded the visit she must make. She would be glad when it was over. What could she say to the stricken woman who spent her time behind closed blinds? Presently she left the dust behind and drove along under the maple trees that lined the village street, over cool roads that were kept well sprinkled.

The Craigmiles lived on the main street of the town in the most dignified of the well-built homes of cream-colored brick, with a wide front stoop and white columns at the entrance. Mary was shown into the parlor by a neat serving maid, who stepped softly as if she were afraid of waking some one. The room was dark and cool, but the air seemed heavy with a lingering musky odor. The dark furniture was set stiffly back against the walls, the floor was covered with a velvet carpet of rich, dark colors, and oil portraits were hung about in heavy gold frames.

Mary looked up at two of these portraits with pride, and rebelled that the light was so shut out that they must always be seen in the obscurity, for Bertrand had painted them, and she considered them her husband's best work. In the painting of them and the long sittings required the intimacy between the two families had begun. Really it had begun before that, for there were other paintings in that home—portraits, old and fine, which Elder Craigmile's father had brought over from Scotland when he came to the new world to establish a new home. These paintings were the pride of Elder Craigmile's heart, and the delight of Bertrand Ballard's artist soul.

To Bertrand they were a discovery—an oasis in a desert. One day the banker had called him in to look at a canvas that was falling to pieces with age, in the hope that the artist might have the skill to restore it. From that day the intimacy began, and a warm friendship sprang up between the two families, founded on Bertrand's love for the old works of art, wherein the ancestors of Peter Craigmile, Senior, looked out from their frames with a dignity and warmth and grace rarely to be met with in this new western land.

Bertrand's heart leaped with joy as he gazed on one of them, the one he had been called on to save if possible. "This must be a genuine Reynolds. Ah! They could paint, those old fellows!" he cried.

"Genuine Reynolds? Why, man, it is! it is! You are a true artist. You knew it in a moment." Peter Senior's heart was immediately filled with admiration for the younger man. "Yes, they were a good family—the Craigmiles of Aberdeen. My father brought all the old portraits coming to him to this country to keep the family traditions alive. It's a good thing—a good thing!"

"She was a beautiful woman, the original of that portrait."

"She was a great beauty, indeed. Her husband took her to London to have it done by the great painter. Ah, the Scotch lasses were fine! Look at that color! You don't see that here, no?"

"Our American women are too pale, for the most part; but then again, your men are too red."

"Ah! Beef and red wine! Beef and red wine! With us in Scotland it was good oatcakes and home-brew—and the air. The air of the Scotch hills and the sea. You don't have such air here, I've

often heard my father say. I've spent the greater part of my life here, so it's mostly the traditions I have—they and the portraits.”

Thus it came about that owing to his desire to keep up the line of family portraits, Peter Craigmile engaged the artist to paint the picture of his gentle, sweet-faced wife. She was painted seated, a little son on either side of her; and now in the dimness she looked out from the heavy gold frame, a half smile playing about her lips, on her lap an open book, and about the low-cut crimson velvet bodice rare old lace pinned at the bosom with a large brooch of wrought gold, framing a delicately cut cameo.

As Mary Ballard sat in the parlor waiting, she looked up in the dusky light at this picture. Ah, yes! Her Bertrand also was a great painter. If only he could be where he might become known and appreciated! She sighed for another reason, also, as she regarded it: because the two little sons clasped by the mother's arms were both gone. Sunny-haired Scotch laddies they were, with fair, wide brows, each in kilt and plaid, with bare knees and ruddy cheeks. What delight her husband had taken in painting it! And now the mother mourned unceasingly the loss of those little sons, and of one other whom Mary had never seen, and of whom they had no likeness. It was indeed hard that the one son left them,—their firstborn,—their hope and pride, should now be going away to leave them, going perhaps to his death.

The door opened and a shadow swept slowly across the room. Always pale and in black—wrapped in her mourning the shadow of sorrow never left this mother; and now it seemed to envelop even Mary Ballard, bright and warm of nature as she was.

Hester Craigmile barely smiled as she held out her slender, blue-veined hand.

“It is very good of you to come to me, Mary Ballard, but you can't make me think I should be reconciled to this. No! It is hard enough to be reconciled to the blows God has dealt me, without accepting what my husband and son see fit to give me in this.” Her hand was cold and passive, and her voice was restrained and low.

Mary Ballard's hands were warm, and her tones were rich and full. She took the proffered hand in both her own and drew the shadow down to sit at her side.

“No, no. I'm not going to try to make you reconciled, or anything. I've just come to tell you that I understand, and that I think you are justified in withholding your consent to Peter Junior's going off in this way.”

“If he were killed, I should feel as if I had consented to his death.”

“Of course you would. I should feel just the same. Naturally you can't forbid his going,—now,—for it's too late, and he would have to go with the feeling of disobedience in his heart, and that would be cruel to him, and worse for you.”

“I know. His father has consented; they think I am wrong. My son thinks I am wrong. But I can't! I can't!” In her suppressed tones sounded the ancient wail of women—mothers crying for their sons sacrificed in war. For a few moments neither of them spoke. It was hard for Mary to break the silence. Her friend sat at her side withdrawn and still; then she lifted her eyes to the picture of herself and the children and spoke again, only breathing the words: “Peter Junior—my beautiful oldest boy—he is the last—the others are all gone—three of them.”

“Peter Junior is splendid. I thought so last evening as I saw him coming up the path. I took it home to myself—what I should feel, and what I would think if he were my son. Somehow we women are so inconsistent and foolish. I knew if he were my son, I never could give my consent to his going, never in the world,—but there! I would be so proud of him for doing just what your boy has done; I would look up to him in admiration, and be so glad that he was just that kind of a man!”

Hester Craigmile turned and looked steadily in her friend's eyes, but did not open her lips, and after a moment Mary continued:—

“To have one's sons taken like these—is—is different. We know they are safe with the One who loved little children; we know they are safe and waiting for us. But to have a boy grow into a young

man like Peter Junior—so straight and fine and beautiful—and then to have him come and say: ‘I’m going to help save our country and will die for it if I must!’ Why, my heart would grow big with thanksgiving that I had brought such an one into the world and reared him. I—What would I do! I couldn’t tell him he might go,—no,—but I’d just take him in my arms and bless him and love him a thousand times more for it, so he could go away with that warm feeling all about his heart; and then—I’d just pray and hope the war might end soon and that he might come back to me rewarded, and—and—still good.”

“That’s it. If he would,—I don’t distrust my son,—but there are always things to tempt, and if—if he were changed in that way, or if he never came back,—I would die.”

“I know. We can’t help thinking about ourselves and how we are left—or how we feel—” Mary hesitated and was loath to go on with that train of thought, but her friend caught her meaning and rose in silence and paced the room a moment, then returned.

“It is easy to talk in that way when one has not lost,” she said.

“I know it seems so, but it is not easy, Hester Craigmile. It is hard—so hard that I came near staying at home this morning. It seemed as if I could not—could not—”

“Yes, what I said was bitter, and it wasn’t honest. You were good to come to me—and what you have said is true. It has helped me; I think it will help me.”

“Then good-by. I’ll go now, but I’ll come again soon.” She left the shadow sitting there with the basket of fruit and flowers at her side unnoticed and forgotten, and stepped quietly out of the darkened room into the sunlight and fresh air.

“I do wish I could induce her to go out a little—or open up her house. I wish—” Mary Ballard said no more, but shut her lips tightly on her thoughts, untied the mare, and drove slowly away.

Hester Craigmile stood for a moment gazing on the picture of her little sons, then for an hour or more wandered up and down over her spacious home, going from room to room, mechanically arranging and rearranging the chairs and small articles on the mantels and tables. Nothing was out of place. No dust or disorder anywhere, and there was the pity of it. If only a boy’s cap could be found lying about, or books left carelessly where they ought not to be! One closed door she passed again and again. Once she laid her hand on the knob, but passed on, leaving it still unopened. At last she turned, and, walking swiftly down the long hall, entered the room.

There the blinds were closed and the curtains drawn, and everything set in as perfect order as in the parlor below. She sat down in a chair placed back against the wall and folded her hands in her lap. No, it was not so hard for Mary Ballard. It would not be, even if she had a son old enough to go. Mary had work to do.

On the wall above Hester’s head was one of the portraits which helped to establish the family dignity of the Craigmiles. If the blinds had been open, one could have seen it in sharp contrast to the pale moth of a woman who sat beneath it. The painting, warm and rich in tone, was of a dame in a long-bodiced dress. She held a fan in her hand and wore feathers in her powdered hair. Her eyes gazed straight across the room into those of a red-coated soldier who wore a sword at his side and gold on his shoulders. Yes, there had been soldiers in the family before Peter Junior’s time.

This was Peter Junior’s room, but the boy was there no longer. He had come home from college one day and had entered it a boy, and then he came out of it and down to his mother, dressed in his new uniform—a man. Now he entered it no more, for he stayed at the camp over on the high bluff of the Wisconsin River. He was wholly taken up with his new duties there, and his room had been set in order and closed as if he were dead.

Sitting there, Hester heard the church clock peal out the hour of twelve, and started. Soon she would hear the front door open and shut, and a heavy tread along the lower hall, and she would go down and sit silently at the table opposite her husband, they two alone. There would be silence, because there would be nothing to say. He loved her and was tender of her, but his word was law, and in all matters he was dictator, lawmaker, and judge, and from his decisions there was no appeal.

It never occurred to him that there ever need be. So Hester Craigmile, reserved and intense, closed her lips on her own thoughts, which it seemed to her to be useless to utter, and let them eat her heart out in silence.

At the moment expected she heard the step on the floor of the vestibule, and the door opened, but it was not her husband's step alone that she heard. Surely it was Peter Junior's and his cousin's. Were they coming to dinner? But no word had been sent. Hester stepped out of the room and stood at the head of the stairs waiting. She did not wish to go down and meet her son before the others, and if he did not find her below, he would know where to look for her.

Peter Senior was an Elder in the Presbyterian Church, and he was always addressed as Elder, even by his wife and son. On the street he was always Elder Craigmile. She heard the men enter the dining room and the door close after them, but still she waited. The maid would have to be told to put two more places at the table, but Hester did not move. The Elder might attend to that. Presently she heard quick steps returning and knew her son was coming. She went to meet him and was clasped in his arms, close and hard.

"You were waiting for me here? Come, mother, come." He stroked her smooth, dark hair, and put his cheek to hers. It was what she needed, what her heart was breaking for. She could even let him go easier after this. Sometimes her husband kissed her, but only when he went a journey or when he returned, a grave kiss of farewell or greeting; but in her son's clasp there was something of her own soul's pent-up longing.

"You'll come down, mother? Rich came home with me."

"Yes, I heard his voice. I am glad he came."

"See here, mother! I know what you are doing. This won't do. Every one who goes to war doesn't get killed or go to the bad. Look at that old redcoat up in my room. He wasn't killed, or where would I be now? I'm coming back, just as he did. We are born to fight, we Craigmiles, and father feels it or he never would have given his consent."

Slowly they went down the long winding flight of stairs—a flight with a smooth banister down which it had once been Peter Junior's delight to slide when there was no one nigh to reprove. Now he went down with his arm around his slender mother's waist, and now and then he kissed her cheek like a lover.

The Elder looked up as they entered, with a slight wince of disapproval, the only demonstration of reproof he ever gave his wife, which changed instantly to as slight a smile, as he noticed the faint color in her cheek, and a brighter light in her eyes than there was at breakfast. He and Richard were both seated as they entered, but they rose instantly, and the Elder placed her chair with all the manner of his forefathers, a courtesy he never neglected.

Hester Craigmile forced herself to converse, and tried to smile as if there were no impending gloom. It was here Mary Ballard's influence was felt by them all. She had helped her friend more than she knew.

"I'm glad to see you, Richard; I was afraid I might not."

"Oh, no, Aunt Hester. I'd never leave without seeing you. I went into the bank and the Elder asked me to dinner and I jumped at the chance."

"This is your home always, you know."

"And it's good to think of, too, Aunt Hester."

She looked at her son and then her nephew. "You are so like in your uniforms I would not know you apart on the street in the dark," she said. Richard shot a merry glance in his uncle's eyes, then only smiled decorously with him and Peter Junior.

"I wish you'd visit the camp and see us drill. We go like clockwork, Peter and I. They call us the twins."

"There is a very good reason for that, for your mother and I were twins, and you resemble her, while Peter Junior resembles me," said the Elder.

“Yes,” said Hester, “Peter Junior looks like his father;” but as she glanced at her son she knew his soul was hers.

Thus the meal passed in quiet, decorous talk, touching on nothing vital, but holding a smoldering fire underneath. The young men said nothing about the fact that the regiment had been called to duty, and soon the camp on the bluff would be breaking up. They dared not touch on the past, and they as little dared touch on the future—indeed there might be no future. So they talked of indifferent things, and Hester parted with her nephew as if they were to meet again soon, except that she called him back when he was halfway down the steps and kissed him again. As for her son, she took him up to his room and there they stayed for an hour, and then he came out and she was left in the house alone.

CHAPTER IV

LEAVE-TAKING

Early in the morning, while the earth was still a mass of gray shadow and mist, and the sky had only begun to show faint signs of the flush of dawn, Betty, awake and alert, crept softly out of bed, not to awaken Martha, who slept the sleep of utter weariness at her side. Martha had returned only the day before from her visit to her grandfather's, a long carriage ride away from Leauvite.

Betty bathed hurriedly, giving a perfunctory brushing to the tangled mass of curls, and getting into her clothing swiftly and silently. She had been cautioned the night before by her mother not to awaken her sister by getting up at too early an hour, for she would be called in plenty of time to drive over with the rest to see the soldiers off. But what if her mother should forget! So she put on her new white dress and gathered a few small parcels which she had carefully tied up the night before, and her hat and little white linen cape, and taking her shoes in her hand, softly descended the stairs.

"Betty, Betty," her mother spoke in a sleepy voice from her own room as the child crept past her door; "why, my dear, it isn't time to get up yet. We shan't start for hours."

"I heard Peter Junior say they were going to strike camp at daybreak, and I want to see them strike it. You don't need to get up. I can go over there alone."

"Why, no, child! Mother couldn't let you do that. They don't want little girls there. Go back to bed, dear. Did you wake Martha?"

"Oh, mother. Can't I go downstairs? I don't want to go to bed again. I'll be very still."

"Will you lie on the lounge and try to go to sleep again?"

"Yes, mother."

Mary Ballard turned with a sigh and presently fell asleep, and Betty softly continued her way and obediently lay down in the darkened room below; but sleep she could not. At last, having satisfied her conscience by lying quietly for a while, she stole to the open door, for in that peaceful spot the Ballards slept with doors and windows wide open all through the warm nights. Oh, but the world was cool and mysterious, and the air was sweet! Little rustling noises made her feel as if strange beings were stirring; above her head were soft chirpings, and somewhere a bird was calling an undulating, long-drawn note, low and sweet, like a tone drawn from her father's violin.

Betty sat on the edge of the porch and put on her shoes, and then walked down the path to the gate. The white peonies and the iris flowers were long since gone, and on the Harvest apple trees and the Sweet Boughs the fruit hung ripening. All Betty's life long she never forgot this wonderful moment of the breaking of day. She listened for sounds to come to her from the camp far away on the river bluff, but none were heard, only the restless moving of her grandfather's team taking their early feed in the small pasture lot near by.

How fresh everything smelled! And the sky! Surely it must be like this in heaven! It must be heaven showing through, while the world slept. She was glad she had awakened early so she might see it,—she and God and the angels, and all the wild things of earth.

Slowly everything around her grew plainer, and long rays of color, faintly pink, streamed up into the sky from the eastern horizon; then suddenly some pale gray, floating clouds above her head blossomed into a wonderful rose laid upon a sea of gold, then gradually turned shell-pink, then faded through changing shades to daytime clouds of white. She wondered if the soldiers saw it, too. They were breaking camp now, surely, for it was day. Still she swung on the gate and dreamed, until a voice roused her.

"So Betty sleeps all night on the gate like a chicken on the fence." A pair of long arms seized her and lifted her high in the air to a pair of strong shoulders. Then she was tossed about and her cheeks rubbed red against grandfather Clide's stubby beard, until she laughed aloud. "What are you doing here on the gate?"

"I was watching the sky. I think God looked through and smiled, for all at once it blossomed. Now the colors are gone."

Grandfather Clide set her gently on her feet and stood looking gravely down on her for a moment. "So?" he said.

"The soldiers are striking camp over there, and then they are going to march to the square, and then every one is to see them form and salute—and then they are to march to the station, and—and—then—and then I don't know what will be—I think glory."

Her grandfather shook his head, his thoughtful face half smiling and half grave. He took her hand. "Come, we'll see what Jack and Jill are up to." He led her to the pasture lot and the horses came and thrust their heads over the fence and whinnied. "See? They want their oats." Then Betty was lifted to old Jack's bare back and grandfather led him by the forelock to the barn, while Jill followed after.

"Did Jack ever 'fall down and break his crown,' grandfather?"

"No, but he ran away once on a time."

"Oh, did Jill come running after?"

"That she did."

The sun had but just cast his first glance at High Knob, where the camp was, and Mary Ballard was hastily whipping up batter for pancakes, the simplest thing she could get for breakfast, as they were to go early enough to see the "boys" at the camp before they formed for their march to the town square. The children were to ride over in the great carriage with grandfather and grandmother Clide, while father and mother would take Bobby with them in the carryall. It was an arrangement liked equally by the three small children and the well-content grandparents.

Betty came to the house, clinging to her grandfather's hand. He drew the large rocking-chair from the kitchen—where winter and summer it occupied a place by the window, that Bertrand in his moments of rest and leisure might sit and read the war news aloud to his wife as she worked—out to a cool grass plot by the door, so that he might still be near enough to chat with his daughter, while enjoying the morning air.

Betty found tidy little Martha, fresh and clean as a rosebud, stepping busily about, setting the table with extra places and putting the chairs around. Filled with self-condemnation at the sight of her sister's helpfulness, she dashed upstairs to do her part in getting all neat for the day. First she coaxed naughty little Jamie, who, in his nightshirt, was out on the porch roof fishing, dangling his shoe over the edge by its strings tied to his father's cane, to return and be hustled into his trousers—funny little garments that came almost to his shoe tops—and to stand still while "sister" washed his face and brushed his curly red hair into a state of semi-orderliness.

Then there was Bobby to be kissed and coaxed, and washed and dressed, and told marvelous tales to beguile him into listening submission. "Mother, mayn't I put Bobby's Sunday dress on him?" called Betty, from the head of the stairs.

"Yes, dear, anything you like, but hurry. Breakfast is almost ready;" then to Martha, "Leave the sweeping, deary, and run down to the spring for the cream." To her father, Mary explained: "The little girls are a great help. Betty manages to do for the boys without irritating them. Now we'll eat while the cakes are hot. Come, Bertrand."

It was a grave mission and a sorrowful one, that early morning ride to say good-by to those youthful volunteers. The breakfast conversation turned on the subject with subdued intensity. Mary Ballard did not explain herself,—she was too busy serving,—but denounced the war in broad terms as "unnecessary and iniquitous," thus eliciting from her husband his usual exclamation, when an aphorism of more than ordinary daring burst from her lips: "Mary! why, Mary! I'm astonished!"

"Every one regards it from a different point of view," said his wife, "and this is my point." It was conclusive.

Grandfather Clide turned sideways, leaned one elbow on the table in a meditative way he had, and spoke slowly. Betty gazed up at him in wide-eyed attention, while Mary poured the coffee and

Martha helped her mother by passing the cakes. Bobby sat close to his comfortable grandmother, who seemed to be giving him all her attention, but who heard everything, and was ready to drop a quiet word of significance when applicable.

"If we bring the question down to its primal cause," said grandfather, "if we bring it down to its primal cause, Mary is right; for the cause being iniquitous, of course, the war is the same."

"What is 'primal cause,' grandfather?" asked Betty.

"The thing that began it all," said grandfather, regarding her quizzically.

"I don't agree with your conclusion," said Bertrand, pausing to put sirup on Jamie's cakes, after repeated demands therefor. "If the cause be evil, it follows that to annihilate the cause—wipe it out of existence—must be righteous."

"In God's good time," said grandmother Clide, quietly.

"God's good time, in my opinion, seems to be when we are forced to a thing." Grandfather lifted one shaggy eyebrow in her direction.

"At any rate, and whatever happens," said Bertrand, "the Union must be preserved, a nation, whole and undivided. My father left England for love of its magnificent ideals of government by the people. Here is to be the vast open ground where all nations may come and realize their highest possibilities, and consequently this nation must be held together and developed as a whole in all its resources, and not cut up into small, ineffective, quarrelsome factions. To allow that would mean the ruin of a colossal scheme for universal progress."

Mary brought her husband's coffee and put it beside his plate, as he was too absorbed to take it, and as she did so placed her hand on his shoulder with gentle pressure and their eyes met for an instant. Then grandfather Clide took up the thread.

"Speaking of your father makes me think of my father, your old grandfather Clide, Mary. He fought with his father in the Revolutionary War when he was a lad no more than Peter Junior's age—or less. He lived through it and came to be a judge of the supreme court of New York, and helped to frame the constitution of that State, too. I used to hear him say, when I was a mere boy,—and he would bring his fist down on the table with an emphasis that made the dishes rattle, for all he averred that he never used gesticulation to aid his oratory,—he used to say,—I remember his words, as if it were but yesterday,—'Slavery is a crime which we, the whole nation, are accountable for, and for which we will be held accountable. If we as a nation will not do away with it by legislation or mutual compact justly, then the Lord will take it into his own hands and wipe it out with blood. He may be patient for a long while, and give us a good chance, but if we wait too long,—it may not be in my day—it may not be in yours,—he will wipe it out with blood!' and here was where he used to make the dishes rattle."

"Maybe, then, this is the Lord's good time," said grandmother.

"I believe in preserving the Union at any cost, slavery or no slavery," said Bertrand.

"The bigger and grander the nation, the more rottenness, if it's rotten at heart. I believe it better—even at the cost of war—to wipe out a national crime,—or let those who want slavery take themselves out of it."

Betty began to quiver through all her little system of high-strung nerves and sympathies. The talk was growing heated, and she hated to listen to excited arguments; yet she gazed and listened with fascinated attention.

Bertrand looked up at his father-in-law. "Why, father! why, father! I'm astonished! I fail to see how permitting one tremendous evil can possibly further any good purpose. To my mind the most tremendous evil that could be perpetrated on this globe—the thing that would do more to set all progress back for hundreds of years, maybe—would be to break up this Union. Here in this country now we are advancing at a pace that covers the centuries of the past in leaps of a hundred years in one. Now cut this land up into little, caviling factions, and where are we? Why, the very motto of the republic would be done away with—'In Union there is strength.' I tell you slavery is a sort of Delilah, and the nation—if it is divided—will be like Sampson with his locks shorn."

“Well, war is here,” said Mary, “and we must send off our young men to the shambles, and later on fill up our country with the refuse of Europe in their stead. It will be a terrible blood-letting for both North and South, and it will be the best blood on both sides. I’m as sorry for the mothers down there as I am for ourselves. Did you get the apples, Bertrand? We’d better start, to be there at eight.”

“I put them in the carryall, my dear, Sweet Boughs and Harvest apples. The boys will have one more taste before they leave.”

“Father, we want to carry some. Put some in the carriage too,” said Martha.

“Yes, father. We want to eat some while we are on the way.”

“Why, Jamie, they are for the soldiers; they’re not for us,” cried Betty, in horror. To eat even one, it seemed to her, would be greed and robbery.

In spite of the gravity of the hour to the older ones, the occasion took on an air of festivity to the children. In grandfather’s dignified old family carriage Martha sat with demure elation on the back seat at her grandmother’s side, wearing her white linen cape, and a wide-brimmed, low-crowned hat of Neapolitan straw, with a blue ribbon around the crown, and a narrow one attached to the front, the end of which she held in her hand to pull the brim down to shade her eyes as was the fashion for little girls of the day. She felt well pleased with the hat, and held the ribbon daintily in her shapely little hand.

At her feet was the basket of apples, and with her other hand she guarded three small packages. Grandmother wore a gray, changeable silk. The round waist fitted her plump figure smoothly, and the skirt was full and flowing. Her bonnet was made of the same silk shirred on rattan, and was not perched on the top of her head, but covered it well and framed her sweet face with a full, white tulle ruching set close under the brim.

Grandfather, up in front, drove Jack and Jill, who, he said, were “feeling their oats.” Betty did not wonder, for oats are sharp and must prick their stomachs. She sat with grandfather,—he had promised she should the night before,—and Jamie was tucked in between them. He ought to have been in behind with grandmother, but his scream of rebellion as he was lifted in brought instant yielding from Betty, when grandfather interfered and took them both. But when Jamie insisted on holding the reins, grandfather grew firm, and when screams again began, his young majesty was lifted down and placed in the road to remain until instant obedience was promised, after which he was restored to the coveted place and away they went.

Betty’s white linen cape blew out behind and her ribbons flew like blue butterflies all about her hat. She forgot to hold down the brim, as polite little girls did who knew how to wear their Sunday clothes. She, too, held three small packages in her lap. For days, ever since Peter Junior and Richard Kildene had taken tea with them in their new uniforms, the little girls had patiently sewed to make the articles which filled these packages.

Mary Ballard had planned them. In each was a needle-book filled with needles large enough to be used by clumsy fingers, a pin ball, a good-sized iron thimble, and a case of thread and yarn for mending, buttons of various sizes, and a bit of beeswax, molded in Mary Ballard’s thimble, to wax their linen thread. All were neatly packed in a case of bronzed leather bound about with firm braid, and tucked under the strap of the leather on the inside was a small pair of scissors. It was all very compact and tied about with the braid. Mother had done some of the hardest of the sewing, but for the most part the stitches had been painstakingly put in by the children’s own fingers.

The morning was cool, and the dust had been laid by a heavy shower in the night. The horses held up their heads and went swiftly, in spite of their long journey the day before. Soon they heard in the distance the sound of the drum, and the merry note of a fife. Again a pang shot through Betty’s heart that she had not been a boy of Peter Junior’s age that she might go to war. She heaved a deep sigh and looked up in her grandfather’s face. It was a grizzled face, with blue eyes that shot a kindly glance sideways at her as if he understood.

When they drew near, the horses danced to the merry tune, as if they would like to go, too. All the camp seemed alive. How splendid the soldiers looked in their blue uniforms, their guns flashing in the sun! Betty watched how their legs with the stripes on them seemed to twinkle as they moved all together, marching in companies. Back and forth, back and forth, they went, and the orders came to the children short and abrupt, as the men went through their maneuvers. They saw the sentinel pacing up and down, and wondered why he did it instead of marching with the other men. All these questions were saved up to ask of grandfather when they got home. They were too interested to do anything but watch now.

At last, very suddenly it seemed, the soldiers broke ranks and scattered over the greensward, running hither and thither like ants. Betty again drew a long breath. Now they were coming, the soldiers in whom they were particularly interested.

“Can they do what they please now?” she asked her grandfather.

“Yes, for a while.”

All along the sentry line carriages were drawn up, for this hour from eight till nine was given to the “boys” to see their friends for the last time in many months, maybe years, maybe forever. As they had come from all over the State, some had no friends to meet them, but guests were there in crowds, and every man might receive a handshake whether he was known or not. All were friends to these young volunteers.

Bertrand Ballard was known and loved by all the youths. Some from the village, and others from the country around, had been in the way of coming to the Ballard home simply because the place was made an enjoyable center for them. Some came to practice the violin and others to sing. Some came to try their hand at sketching and painting and some just to hear Bertrand talk. All was done for them quite gratuitously on his part, and no laugh was merrier than his. Even the chore boy came in for a share of the Ballards’ kindly help, sitting at Mary Ballard’s side in the long winter evenings, and conning lessons to patch up an education snatched haphazard and hardly come by.

Here comes one of them now, head up, smiling, and happy-go-lucky. “Bertrand, here comes Johnnie. Give him the apples and let him distribute them. Poor boy! I’m sorry he’s going; he’s too easily led,” said Mary.

“Oh! Johnnie, Johnnie Cooper! I’ve got something for you. We made them. Mother helped us,” cried Martha. Now the children were out of the carriage and running about among their friends.

Johnnie Cooper snatched Jamie from the ground and threw him up over his head, then set him down again and took the parcel. Then he caught Martha up and set her on his shoulder while he peeped into the package.

“Stop, Johnnie. Set me down. I’m too big now for you to toss me up.” Her arms were clasped tightly under his chin as he held her by the feet. Slowly he let her slide to the ground and thrust the little case in his pocket, and stooping, kissed the child.

“I’ll think of you and your mother when I use this,” he said.

“And you’ll write to us, won’t you, Johnnie?” said Mary. “If you don’t, I shall think something is gone wrong with you.” He knew what she meant, and she knew he knew. “There are worse things than bullets, Johnnie.”

“Never you worry for me, Mrs. Ballard. We’re going down for business, and you won’t see me again until we’ve licked the ‘rebs.” He held her hand awkwardly for a minute, then relieved the tension by carrying off the two baskets of apples. “I know the trees these came from,” he said, and soon a hundred boys in blue were eating Bertrand’s choicest apples.

“Here come the twins!” said some one, as Peter Junior and Richard Kildene came toward them across the sward. Betty ran to meet them and caught Richard by the hand. She loved to have him swing her in long leaps from the ground as he walked.

“See, Richard, I made this for you all myself—almost. I put C in the corner so it wouldn’t get mixed with the others, because this I made especially for you.”

“Did you? Why didn’t you put R in the corner if you meant it for me? I think you meant this for Charley Crabbe.”

“No, I didunt.” Betty spoke most emphatically. “Martha has one for him. I put C because—you’ll see when you open it. Everything’s bound all round with my very best cherry-colored hair ribbon, to make it very special, and that is what C is for. All the rest are brown, and this is prettier, and it won’t get mixed with Peter Junior’s.”

“Ah, yes. C is for cherry—Betty’s hair ribbon; and the gold-brown leather is for Betty’s hair. Is that it?”

“Yep.”

“Haven’t I one, too?” asked Peter Junior.

“Yep. We made them just alike, and you can sew on buttons and everything.”

Thus the children made the leave-taking less somber, to the relief of every one.

Grandfather and grandmother Clide had friends of their own whom they had come all the forty miles to see,—neighbor boys from many of the farms around their home, and their daughter-in-law’s own brother, who was like a son to them. There he stood, lithe and strong and genial, and, alas! too easy-going to be safe among the temptations of the camp.

Quickly the hour passed and the call came to form ranks for the march to the town square, where speeches were to be made and prayers were to be read before the march to the station.

Our little party waited until the last company had left the camp ground and the excited children had seen them all and heard the sound of the fife and drum to their last note and beat as the “boys in blue” filed past them and off down the winding country road among the trees. Nothing was said by the older ones of what might be in the future for those gallant youths—yes, and for the few men of greater years with them—as they wound out of sight. It was better so. Bobby fell asleep in Mary Ballard’s arms as they drove back, and a bright tear fell from her wide-open, far-seeing eyes down on his baby cheek.

It was no lack of love for his son that kept Elder Craigmile away at the departure of the boys from their camp on the bluff. He had virtually said his say and parted from his son when he gave his consent to his going in the first place. To him war meant sacrifice, and the parting with sons, at no matter what cost. The dominant idea with him was ever the preservation of the Union. At nine o’clock as usual that morning he had entered the bank, and a few minutes later, when the troops formed on the square, he came out and took his appointed place on the platform, as one of the speakers, and offered a closing prayer for the confounding of the enemy after the manner of David of old—then he descended and took his son’s hand, as he stood in the ranks, with his arm across the boy’s shoulder, looked a moment in his eyes; then, without a word, he turned and reëntered the bank.

CHAPTER V

THE PASSING OF TIME

It was winter. The snow was blowing past the windows in blinding drifts, and the road in front of the Ballards' home was fast filling to the tops of the fences. A bright wood-fire was burning in the great cookstove, which had been brought into the living room for warmth and to economize steps, as all the work of the household devolved on Mary and little Betty, since Martha spent the week days at the Deans in the village in order to attend the high school.

Mary gazed anxiously now and then through the fast-frosting window panes on the opaque whiteness of the storm without, where the trees tossed their bare branches weirdly, like threatening gray phantoms, grotesque and dimly seen through the driving snow. It was Friday afternoon and still early, and brave, busy little Martha always came home on Fridays after school to help her mother on Saturdays.

"Oh, I hope Martha hasn't started," said Mary. "Look out, Bertrand. This is the wildest storm we have had this year."

"Mrs. Dean would never allow her to set out in this storm, I'm sure," said Bertrand. "I cautioned her yesterday when I was there never to start when the weather seemed like a blizzard."

Bertrand had painted in his studio above as long as the light remained, and now he was washing his brushes, carefully swishing the water out of them and drawing each one between his lips to shape it properly before laying it down. Mary laid the babe in her arms in its crib, and rocked it a moment while she and Bertrand chatted.

A long winter and summer had passed since the troops marched away from Leauvite, and now another winter was passing. For a year and a bit more, little Janey, the babe now being hushed to sleep, had been a member of the family circle. Thus it was that Mary Ballard seldom went to the village, and Betty learned her lessons at home as best she could, and tended the baby and helped her mother. But Bertrand and his wife had plenty to talk about; for he went out and saw their friends in the village, led the choir on Sundays, taught the Bible class, heard all the news, and talked it over with Mary.

Thus, in one way or another, all the new books found their way into the Ballards' home, were read and commented on, even though books were not written so much for commercial purposes then as now, and their writers were looked up to with more respect than criticism. The *Atlantic Monthly* and *Littell's Living Age*, *Harper's Magazine*, and the *New York Tribune* also brought up a variety of subjects for discussion. Now and then a new poem by Whittier, or Bryant, or some other of the small galaxy of poets who justly were becoming the nation's pride, would appear and be read aloud to Mary as she prepared their meals, or washed the dishes or ironed small garments, while Betty listened with intent eyes and ears, as she helped her mother or tended the baby.

That afternoon, while the storm souged without, the cow and horse were comfortably quartered in their small stable, which was banked with straw to keep out the cold. Indoors, Jamie was whittling behind the warm cookstove over a newspaper spread to catch the chips, while Bobby played quietly in a corner with two gray kittens and a worsted ball. Janey was asleep in the crib which Betty jogged now and then while she knit on a sock for the soldiers,—Mary and the two little girls were always knitting socks for the soldiers these days in their spare moments and during the long winter evenings,—Mary was kneading white loaves of bread with floury hands, and Bertrand sat close beside the window to catch the last rays of daylight by which to read the war news.

Bertrand always read the war news first,—news of battles and lists of wounded and slain and imprisoned, and saddest of all, lists of the missing,—following closely the movements of their own company of "boys" from Leauvite. Mary listened always with a thought of the shadow in the banker's home, and the mother there, watching and waiting for the return of her boy. Although their own home was safe, the sorrow of other homes, devastated and mourning, weighed heavily upon Mary Ballard,

and she needed to listen to the stirring editorials of the *Tribune*, which Bertrand read with dramatic intensity, to bolster up her faith in the rightness of this war between men who ought to be brothers in their hopes and ambitions for the national life of their great country.

"I suppose it is too great a thing to ask—that such a tremendous and mixed nation as ours should be knit together for the good of all men in a spirit of brotherly love—but what a thing to ask for! What a thing to try for! If I were a man, I would pray that I might gain influence over my fellows just for that—just—for that," said Mary.

"Ah," replied her husband, with fond optimism, "you need not say 'If I were a man,' for that. It is the women who have the influence; don't you know that, Mary?"

Mary looked down at her work, an incredulous smile playing about her lips.

"Well, my dear?" Bertrand loved a response.

"Well, Bertrand? Men do like to talk about our 'sweet influence,' don't they?" Then she laughed outright.

"But, Mary—but, Mary, it is true. Women do more with their influence than men can do with their guns," and Bertrand really meant what he said. Dusky shadows filled the room, but if the light had been stronger, he would have seen that little ironical smile still playing about his wife's lips.

"Did you see Judge Logan again about those Waupaca lots?"

Bertrand wondered what the lots had to do with the subject, but suffered the digression patiently, for the feminine mind was not supposed to be coherent. "Yes, my love; I saw him yesterday."

"What did you do about them? I hope you refused."

"No, my dear. I thought best not. He showed me very conclusively that in time they will be worth more—much more—than the debt."

"Then why did he offer them to you for the debt? The portrait you painted for him will be worth more, too, in time, than the debt. You remember when you asked me what I thought, I said we needed the money more now."

"Yes, I remember; but this plan is a looking toward the future. I didn't think it wise to refuse."

Mary said nothing, but went out, returning presently with two lighted candles. Bertrand was replenishing the fire. Had he been looking at her face with the light of the candles on it as she carried them, he would have noticed that little smile about her lips.

"I'm very glad we brought the bees in yesterday," he said. "This storm would have made it impossible to do it to-day, and we should have lost them."

"How about those lectures, dear? The 'boys' are all gone now, and you won't have them to take up your time evenings, so you can easily prepare them. They will take you into the city now and then, and that will keep you in touch with the world outside this village." Bertrand had been requested to give a series of lectures on art in one of the colleges in the city. He had been well pleased and had accepted, but later had refused because of certain dictatorship exercised by the Board, which he felt infringed on his province of a suitable selection of subjects. He was silent for a moment. Again Mary had irrelevantly and abruptly changed the subject of conversation. Where was the connection between bees and lectures? "I really wish you would, dear," urged Mary.

"You still wish it after the affront the Board has given me?"

"I know, but what do they know about art? I would give the lectures if it was only to be able—incidentally—to teach them something. Be a little conciliatory, dear."

"I will make no concessions. If I give the lectures, I must be allowed to select my courses. It is my province."

"Did you see Elder Craigmile about it?"

"I did."

"And what did he say?"

"He seemed to think the Board was right."

"I knew he would. You remember I asked you not to go to him about it, and that was why."

“Why did you think so? He assumes to be my friend.”

“Because people who don’t know anything about art always are satisfied with their own opinions. They don’t know anything to upset them. He knows more than some of them, but how much is that? Enough to know that he owns some fine paintings; but you taught him their value, now, didn’t you?” Bertrand smiled, but said nothing, and his wife continued. “Prepare the lectures, dear, for my sake. I love to know that you are doing such work.”

“I can’t. The action of the Board is an insult to my intelligence. What are you smiling about?”

“About you, dear.”

“Mary, why, Mary! I—”

But Mary only smiled the more. “You love my irrelevance and inconsistency, you say,—”

“I love any weakness that is yours, Mary. What are you keeping back from me?”

“The weakness that is mine, dear.” Again Mary laughed outright. “It would be useless to tell you—or to try to explain. I love you, isn’t that enough?”

Bertrand thought it ought to be, but was not sure, and said so. Then Mary laughed again, and he kissed her, shaking his head dubiously, and took up his violin for solace. Thus an hour passed; then Betty set the table for supper, and the long evening followed like many another evening, filled with the companionship only comfortably married people know, while Bertrand read from the poets.

Since, with a man’s helplessness in such matters, he could not do the family mending, or knit for the soldiers, or remodel old garments into new, it behooved him to render such tasks pleasant for the busy hand and brain that must devise and create and make much out of little for economy’s sake; and this Bertrand did to Mary’s complete satisfaction.

Evenings like these were Betty’s school, and they seemed all the schooling she was likely to get, for the family funds were barely sufficient to cover the expenses of one child at a time. But, as Mary said, “It’s not so bad for Betty to be kept at home, for she will read and study, anyway, because she likes it, and it won’t hurt her to learn to be practical as well;” and no doubt Mary was right.

Bertrand was himself a poet in his appreciation and fineness of choice, and he read for Mary with all the effectiveness and warmth of color that he would put into a recitation for a large audience, carried on solely by his one sympathetic listener and his love for what he read; while Betty, in her corner close to the lamp behind her father’s chair, listened unnoticed, with eager soul, rapt and uplifted.

As Bertrand read he commented. “These men who are writing like this are doing for this country what the Lake Poets did for England. They are making true literature for the nation, and saving it from banality. They are going to live. They will be classed some day with Wordsworth and all the rest of the best. Hear this from James Russell Lowell. It’s about a violin, and is called ‘In the Twilight.’ It’s worthy of Shelley.” And Bertrand read the poem through, while Mary let her knitting fall in her lap and listened. He loved to see her listen in that way.

“Read again the verse that begins: ‘O my life.’ I seem to like it best.” And he read it over:—

“O my life, have we not had seasons
That only said, Live and rejoice?
That asked not for causes and reasons,
But made us all feeling and voice?
When we went with the winds in their blowing,
When Nature and we were peers,
And we seemed to share in the flowing
Of the inexhaustible years?
Have we not from the earth drawn juices
Too fine for earth’s sordid uses?
Have I heard, have I seen

All I feel, all I know?
Doth my heart overween?
Or could it have been
Long ago?"

"And the next, Bertrand. I love to hear them over again." And he read:—

"Sometimes a breath floats by me,
An odor from Dreamland sent,
That makes the ghost seem nigh me
Of a splendor that came and went,
Of a life lived somewhere, I know not
In what diviner sphere,
Of memories that stay not and go not,
Like music heard once by an ear
That cannot forget or reclaim it,
A something so shy, it would shame it
To make it a show,
A something too vague, could I name it,
For others to know,
As if I had lived it or dreamed it,
As if I had acted or schemed it,
Long ago!"

"And the last verse, father. I like the last best," cried Betty, suddenly.

"Why, my deary. I thought you were gone to bed."

"No, mother lets me sit up a little while longer when you're reading. I like to hear you." And he read for her the last verse:—

"And yet, could I live it over,
This life that stirs my brain,
Could I be both maiden and lover,
Moon and tide, bee and clover,
As I seem to have been, once again,
Could I but speak it and show it,
This pleasure more sharp than pain,
That baffles and lures me so,
The world should once more have a poet,
Such as it had
In the ages glad,
Long ago!"

Then, wishing to know more of the secret springs of his little daughter's life, he asked: "Why do you love that stanza best, Betty, my dear?"

Betty blushed crimson to the roots of her hair, for what she carried in her heart was too precious to tell, but she meant to be a poet. Even then, in the pocket of her calico dress lay a little book and a stubbed lead pencil, and in the book was already the beginning of her great epic. Her father had said the epic was a thing of the past, that in the future none would be written, for that it was a form

of expressions that belonged to the world's youth, and that age brought philosophy and introspection, but not epics.

She meant to surprise her father some day with this poem. The great world was so full of mystery—of seductive beauty and terror and of strange, enticing charm! She saw and felt it always. Even now, in the driving, whirling storm without, in the darkness of her chamber, or when she looked through the frosted panes into the starry skies at midnight, always it was there all about her,—a something unexpressed, unseen, but close—close to her,—the mystery which throbbed through all her small being, and which she was one day to find out and understand and put into her great epic.

She thought over her father's question, hardly knowing why she liked that last stanza best. She slowly wound up her ball of yarn and thrust the needles through it, and dropped it into her mother's workbasket before she replied; then, taking up her candle, she looked shyly in her father's eyes.

"Because I like where it says: 'This pleasure more sharp than pain, That baffles and lures me so.'" Then she was gone, hurrying away lest they should question her further and learn about the little book in her pocket.

Thus time passed with the Ballards, many days swiftly flying, laden with a fair share of sweetness and pleasure, and much of harassment and toil, but in the main bringing happiness.

CHAPTER VI

THE END OF THE WAR

It was three years after the troops marched away from High Knob encampment before either Peter Junior or Richard Kildene were again in Leauvite, and then only Peter returned, because he was wounded, and not that he was unwilling to enlist again, as did Richard and many of the boys, when their first term of service was ended. He returned with the brevet of a captain, for gallant conduct in the encounter in which he received his wound, but only a shadow of the healthy, earnest boy who had stood in the ranks on the town square of Leauvite three years before; yet this very fact brought life and hope to his waiting mother, now that she had the blessed privilege of nursing him back to strength.

It seemed as though her long period of mourning ended when Peter Junior, pallid in his blue uniform, his hair darkened and matted with the dampness caused by weakness and pain, was borne in between the white columns of his father's house. When the news reached him that his son was lying wounded in a southern hospital, the Elder had, for the first time in many, many years, followed an impulse without pausing to consider his act beforehand. He left the bank on the instant and started for the scene of battles, only hurrying home to break the news first to his wife. Yielding to a rare tenderness, he touched her hair as he kissed her, and enjoined on her to remember that their son was not slain, but by a merciful Providence was only wounded and might be spared to them. She must thank the Lord and be ready to nurse him back to life.

Why Providence should be thus merciful to their son rather than to many another son, the good Elder did not pause to consider. Possibly he thought it no more than just that the prayers of the righteous should be answered by a supernatural intervention between their sons and the bullets of the enemy. His ideas on this point were no doubt vague at the best, but certain it is that he returned from his long and difficult journey to the seat of strife after his boy, with a clearer notion of what war really was, and a more human sympathy for those who go and suffer, and, as might be anticipated with those of his temperament, an added bitterness against those whom he felt were to blame for the conflict.

When Peter Junior left his home, his father had enjoined on him to go, not in the spirit of bitterness and enmity, but as an act of duty, to teach a needed lesson; for surely the Lord was on the side of the right, and was using the men of the North to teach this needed lesson to those laboring in error. Ah! it is a very different point of view we take when we suffer, instead of merely moralizing on the suffering of others; especially we who feel that we know what is right, and lack in great part the imagination to comprehend the other man's viewpoint. To us of that cast of mind there is only one viewpoint and that is our own, and only a bodily departure to the other man's hilltop or valley, as the case may be, will open the eyes and enlarge the understanding to the extent of even allowing our fellows to see things in another light from our own.

In this instance, while the Elder's understanding had been decidedly enlarged, it had been in but one direction, and the effect had not been to his spiritual benefit, for he had seen only the suffering of his own side, and, being deficient in power to imagine what might be, he had taken no charitable thought for the other side. Instead, a feeling of hatred had been stirred within him,—a feeling he felt himself justified in and therefore indulged and named: "Righteous Indignation."

The Elder's face was stern and hard as he directed the men who bore his boy on the litter where to turn, and how to lift it above the banister in going up the stair so as not to jar the young man, who was too weak after the long journey to do more than turn his eyes on his mother's face.

But that mother's face! It seemed to him he had never seen it so radiant and charming, for all that her hair had grown silvery white in the three years since he had last kissed her. He could not take his eyes from it, and besought her not to leave his side, even when the Elder bade her go and not excite him, but allow him to rest.

No sooner was her son laid on his own bed in his old room than she began a series of gentle ministrations most sweet to the boy and to herself. But the Elder had been told that all he needed now was rest and absolute quiet, and the surgeon's orders must be carried out regardless of all else. Hester Craigmile yielded, as always, to the Elder's will, and remained without, seated close beside her son's door, her hands, that ached to serve, lying idle in her lap, while the Elder brought him his warm milk and held it to his lips, lifting his head to drink it, and then left him with the command to sleep.

"Don't go in for an hour at least," he enjoined on his wife as he passed her and took his way to the bank, for it was too early for closing, and there would still be time for him to look into his affairs a bit. Thus for the banker the usual routine began.

Not so for Hester Craigmile. Joy and life had begun for her. She had her boy again—quite to herself when the Elder was away, and the tears for very happiness came to her eyes and dropped on her hands unchecked. Had the Elder been there he would have enjoined upon her to be controlled and she would have obeyed, but now there was no need, and she wept deliciously for joy while she still sat outside the door and listened. Intense—eager—it seemed almost as if she could hear him breathe.

"Mother!" Hark! Did he speak? "Mother!" It was merely a breath, but she heard and went swiftly to him. Kneeling, she clasped him, and her tears wet his cheek, but at the same time they soothed him, and he slept. It was thus the Elder found them when he returned from the bank, both sweetly sleeping. He did not take his wife away for fear of waking his son, nevertheless he was displeased with her, and when they met at table that evening, she knew it.

The whole order of the house was changed because of Peter Junior's return. Blinds, windows, and doors were thrown open at the direction of the physician, that he might be given all the air and sunlight it was possible to admit; else he would never gain strength, for so long had he lived in the open air, in rain and sun, that he had need now of every help nature could give.

A bullet had struck him in the hip and glanced off at a peculiar angle, rendering his recovery precarious and long delayed, and causing the old doctor to shake his head with the fear that he must pass the rest of his life a cripple. Still, normal youth is buoyant and vigorous and mocks at physicians' fears, and after a time, what with heart at rest, with loving and unceasing care on his mother's part, and rigorous supervision on his father's, Peter Junior did at length recover sufficiently to be taken out to drive, and began to get back the good red blood in his veins.

During this long period of convalescence, Peter Junior's one anxiety was for his cousin Richard. Rumors had reached him that his comrade had been wounded and taken prisoner, yet nothing definite had been heard, until at last, after much writing, he learned Richard's whereabouts, and later that he had been exchanged. Then, too ill and prison-worn to go back to his regiment, he appeared one day, slowly walking up the village street toward the banker's house.

There he was welcomed and made much of, and the two young men spent a while together happily, the best of friends and comrades, still filled with enthusiasm, but with a wider knowledge of life and the meaning of war. These weeks were few and short, and soon Richard was back in the army. Peter Junior, envying him, still lay convalescing and only able with much difficulty to crawl to the carriage for his daily drive.

His mother always accompanied him on these drives, and the very first of them was to the home of the Ballards. It was early spring, the air was biting and cool, and Peter was unable to alight, but Mary and her husband came to them where they waited at the gate and stood long, talking happily. Jamie and Bobby followed at their heels and peered up curiously at the wounded soldier, but Betty was seized with a rare moment of shyness that held her back.

Dear little Betty! She had grown taller since Peter Junior had taken that last tea at the Ballards. No longer care free, the oldest but one, she had taken many of her mother's burdens upon her young shoulders, albeit not knowing that they were burdens, since they were wholly acts of love and joyously done. She was fully conscious of her advancing years, and took them very seriously, regarding her acts with a grave and serene sense of their importance. She had put back the wild hair that used to

fly about her face until her father called her “An owl in an ivy bush” and her mother admonished her that her “head was like a mop.” Now, being in her teens, she wore her dresses longer and never ran about barefooted, paddling in the brook below the spring, although she would like to do so; still she was child enough to run when she should walk, and to laugh when some would sigh.

Her thoughts had been romantically active regarding Peter Junior, how he would look, and how splendid and great he was to have been a real soldier and come home wounded—to have suffered and bled for his country. And Richard, too, was brave and splendid. He must have been in the very front of the battle to have been taken prisoner. She wondered a little if he remembered her, but not much, for how could men with great work to do, like fighting and dying for their country, stop to think of a little girl who was still in short dresses when they had seen her last?

Then, when the war was ended at last, there was Richard returned and stopping at his uncle’s. In the few short visits he made at the Ballards’ he greeted Betty as of old, as he would greet a little sister of whom he was fond, and she accepted his frank, old-time brotherliness in the same spirit, gayly and happily, revealing but little of herself, and holding a slight reserve in her manner which seemed to him quite delightful and maidenly. Then, all too suddenly, he was gone again, but in his heart he carried a memory of her that made a continual undercurrent in his thoughts.

And now Betty’s father and mother were actually talking with Peter Junior at their very gate. Impulse would have sent her flying to meet him, but that new, self-conscious shyness stayed her feet, for he was one to be approached with reverence. He was afflicted with no romantic shyness with regard to her, however. He quite forgot her, indeed, although he did ask in a general way after the children and even mentioned Martha in particular, as, being the eldest, she was best remembered. So Betty did not see Peter Junior this time, but she stood where she could see the top of the carriage from her bedroom window, whither she had fled, and she could see the blue sleeve of his coat as he put out his arm to take her mother’s hand at parting. That was something, and she listened with beating heart for the sound of his voice. Ah, little he dreamed what a tumult he had raised in the heart of that young being whose imagination had been so stirred by all that she had read and heard of war, and the part taken in it by their own young men of Leauvite. That Peter Junior had come home brevetted a captain for his bravery crowned him with glory. All that day Betty went about with dreams in her head, and coursing through them was the voice of the wounded young soldier.

At last, with the slow march of time, came the proclamation of peace, and the nation so long held prostrate—a giant struggling against fetters of its own forging, blinded and strangling in its own blood—reared its head and cried out for the return of Hope, groping on all sides to gather the divine youth to its arms, when, as a last blow, dealt by a wanton hand, came the death of Lincoln.

Then it was that the nation recoiled and bowed itself for a time, beaten and crushed—both North and South—and vultures gathered at the seat of conflict and tore at its vitals and wrangled over the spoils. Then it was that they who had sowed discord stooped to reap the Devil’s own harvest,—a woeful, bitter, desperate time, when more enmity and deep rancor was bred and treasured up for future sorrow than during all the years of the honest and active strife of the war.

In the very beginning that first news of the firing on Fort Sumter flew through the North like a tragic cry, and men felt a sense of doom hanging over the nation. Bertrand Ballard heard it and walked sorrowfully home to his wife, and sat long with bowed head, brooding and silent. Neighbor Wilcox heard it, and, leaving his business, entered his home and called his household together with the servants and held family worship—a service which it was his custom to hold only on the Sabbath—and earnestly prayed for the salvation of the country, and that wisdom might be granted its rulers, after which he sent his oldest son to fight for the cause. Elder Craigmile heard it, and consented that his last and only son should enter the ranks and give his life, if need be, for the saving of the nation. Still, tempering all this sorrow and anxiety was the chance for action, and the hope of victory.

But now, in this later time, when the strength of the nation had been wasted, when victory itself was dark with mourning for sons slain, the loss of the one wise leader to whom all turned with

uplifted hearts seemed the signal for annihilation; and then, indeed, it appeared that the prophecy of Mary Ballard's old grandfather had been fulfilled and the curse of slavery had not only been wiped out with blood, but that the greater curse of anarchy and misrule had taken its place to still further scourge the nation.

Mary Ballard's mother, while scarcely past her prime, was taken ill with fever and died, and immediately upon this blow to the dear old father who was not yet old enough by many years to be beyond his usefulness to those who loved and depended on him, came the tragic death of Lincoln, whom he revered and in whom all his hopes for the right adjustment of the nation's affairs rested. Under the weight of the double calamity he gave up hope, and left the world where all looked so dark to him, almost before the touch of his wife's hand had grown cold in his.

"Father died of a broken heart," said Mary, and turned to her husband and children with even more intensity of devotion. "For," she said, "after all, the only thing in life of which we can be perfectly sure is our love for each other. A grave may open at our feet anywhere at any time, and only love oversteps it."

With such an animating spirit as this, no family can be wholly sad, and though poverty pinched them at times, and sorrow had bitterly visited them, with years and thrift things changed. Bertrand painted more pictures and sold them; the children were gay and vigorous and brought life and good times to the home, and the girls grew up to be womanly, winsome lasses, light-hearted and good to look upon.

Enough of the war and the evils thereof has been said and written and sung. Animosity is dead, and brotherhood and mutual service between the two opposing factions of one great family have taken the place of strife. Useless now to say what might have been, or how otherwise that terrible time of devastation and sorrow could have been avoided. Enough to know that at last as a nation, whole and undivided, we may pull together in the tremendous force of our united strength, and that now we may take up the "White Man's Burden" and bear it to its magnificent conclusion to the service of all mankind and the glory of God.

CHAPTER VII

A NEW ERA BEGINS

Bertrand Ballard's studio was at the top of his house, with a high north window and roughly plastered walls of uncolored sand, left as Bertrand himself had put the plaster on, with his trowel marks over the surface as they happened to come, and the angles and projections thereof draped with cobwebs.

When Peter Junior was able to leave his home and get about a little on his crutches, he loved to come there and rest and spend his idle hours, and Bertrand found pleasure in his companionship. They read together, and sang together, and laughed together, and no sound was more pleasant to Mary Ballard's ears than this same happy laughter. Peter had sorely missed the companionship of his cousin, for, at the close of the war, no longer a boy and unwilling to be dependent and drifting, Richard had sought out a place for himself in the work of the world.

First he had gone to Scotland to visit his mother's aunts. There he found the two dear old ladies, sweetly observant of him, willing to tell him much of his mother, who had been scarcely younger than the youngest of them, but discreetly reticent about his father. From this he gathered that for some reason his father was under a cloud. Yet he did not shrink from trying to learn from them all they knew about him, and for what reason they spoke as if to even mention his name was an indiscretion. It was really little they knew, only that he had gravely displeased their nephew, Peter Craigmile, who had brought Richard up, and who was his mother's twin brother.

"But why did Uncle Peter have to bring me up? You say he quarreled with my father?"

"Weel, ye see, ye'r mither was dead." It was Aunt Ellen, the elder by twenty years, who told him most about it, she who spoke with the broadest Scotch.

"Was my father a bad man, that Uncle 'Elder' disliked him so?"

"Weel now, I'd no say that; he was far from that to be right fair to them both—for ye see—ye'r mither would never have loved him if he'd been that—but he—he was an Irishman, and ye'r Uncle Peter could never thole an Irishman, and he—he—fair stole ye'r mither from us a'—an—" she hesitated to continue, then blurted out the real horror. "Your Uncle Peter kenned he had ance been in the theayter, a sort o' an actor body an' he couldna thole that."

But little was to be gained with all his questioning, and what he could learn seemed no more than that his father had done what any man might be expected to do if some one stood between him and the girl he loved; so Richard felt that there must be something unknown to any one but his uncle that had turned them all against his father. Why had his father never appeared to claim his son? Why had he left his boy to be reared by a man who hated the boy's father? It was a strange thing to do, and it must be that his father was dead.

At this time Richard was filled with ambitions,—fired by his early companionship with Bertrand Ballard,—and thought he would go to France and become an artist;—to France, the Mecca of Bertrand's dreams—he desired of all things to go there for study. But of all this he said nothing to any one, for where was the money? He would never ask his uncle for it, and now that he had learned that he had been all his young life really a dependent on the bounty of his Uncle Peter, he could no longer accept his help. He would hereafter make his own way, asking no favors.

The old aunts guessed at his predicament, and offered to give him for his mother's sake enough to carry him through the first year, but he would not allow them to take from their income to pay his bills. No, he would take his way back to America, and find a place for himself in the new world; seek some active, stirring work, and save money, and sometime—sometime he would do the things his heart loved. He often thought of Betty, the little Betty who used to run to meet him and say such quaint things; some day he would go to her and take her with him. He would work first and do something worthy of so choice a little mortal.

Thus dreaming, after the manner of youth, he went to Ireland, to his father's boyhood home. He found only distant relatives there, and learned that his father had disposed of all he ever owned of Irish soil to an Englishman. A cousin much older than himself owned and still lived on the estate that had been his grandfather Kildene's, and Richard was welcomed and treated with openhearted hospitality. But there, also, little was known of his father, only that the peasants on the estate remembered him lovingly as a free-hearted gentleman.

Even that little was a relief to Richard's sore heart. Yes, his father must be dead. He was sorry. He was a lonely man, and to have a relative who was his very own, as near as a father, would be a great deal. His cousin, Peter Junior, was good as a friend, but from now on they must take paths that diverged, and that old intimacy must naturally change. His sweet Aunt Hester he loved, and she would fill the mother's place if she could, but it was not to be. It would mean help from his Uncle Peter, and that would mean taking a place in his uncle's bank, which had already been offered him, but which he did not want, which he would not accept if he did want it.

So, after a long and happy visit at his cousin Kildene's, in Ireland, he at last left for America again, and plunged into a new, interesting, and vigorous life, one that suited well his energetic nature. He found work on the great railway that was being built across the plains to the Pacific Coast. He started as an engineer's assistant, but soon his talent for managing men caused his employers to put him in charge of gangs of workmen who were often difficult and lawless. He did not object; indeed he liked the new job better than that he began with. He was more interested in men than materials.

The life was hard and rough, but he came to love it. He loved the wide, sweeping prairies, and, later on, the desert. He liked to lie out under the stars,—often when the men slept under tents,—his gun at his side and his thoughts back on the river bluffs at Leauvite. He did a lot of dreaming and thinking, and he never forgot Betty. He thought of her as still a child, although he was expecting her to grow up and be ready for him when he should return to her. He had a vague sort of feeling that all was understood between them, and that she was quietly becoming womanly, and waiting for him.

Peter Junior might have found other friends in Leauvite had he sought them out, but he did not care for them. His nature called for what he found in Bertrand's studio, and he followed the desire of his heart regardless of anything else, spending all the time he could reasonably filch from his home. And what wonder! Richard would have done the same and was even then envying Peter the opportunity, as Peter well knew from his cousin's letters. There was no place in the village so fascinating and delightful as this little country home on its outskirts, no conversation more hopeful and helpful than Bertrand's, and no welcome sweeter or kinder than Mary Ballard's.

One day, after Richard had gone out on the plains with the engineers of the projected road, Peter lay stretched on a long divan in the studio, his head supported by his hand as he half reclined on his elbow, and his one crutch—he had long since discarded the other—within reach of his arm. His violin also lay within reach, for he had been playing there by himself, as Bertrand had gone on one of his rare visits to the city a hundred miles away.

Betty Ballard had heard the wail of his violin from the garden, where she had been gathering pears. That was how she knew where to find him when she quickly appeared before him, rosy and flushed from her run to the house and up the long flight of stairs.

As Peter lay there, he was gazing at the half-finished copy he had been making of the head of an old man, for Peter had decided, since in all probability he would be good for no active work such as Richard had taken up, that he too would become an artist, like Bertrand Ballard. To have followed his cousin would have delighted his heart, for he had all the Scotchman's love of adventure, but, since that was impossible, nothing was more alluring than the thought of fame and success as an artist. He would not tie himself to Leauvite to get it. He would go to Paris, and there he would do the things Bertrand had been prevented from doing. Poor Bertrand! How he would have loved the chance Peter Junior was planning for himself as he lay there dreaming and studying the half-finished copy.

Suddenly he beheld Betty, standing directly in front of the work, extending to him a folded bit of paper. "Here's a note from your father," she cried.

Looking upon her thus, with eyes that had been filled with the aged, rugged face on the canvas, Betty appealed to Peter as a lovely vision. He had never noticed before, in just this way, her curious charm, but these months of companionship and study with Bertrand had taught him to see beauty understandingly, and now, as she stood panting a little, with breath coming through parted lips and hair flying almost in the wild way of her childhood, Peter saw, as if it were a revelation, that she was lovely. He raised himself slowly and reached for the note without taking his eyes from her face.

He did not open the letter, but continued to look in her eyes, at which she turned about half shyly. "I heard your violin; that's how I knew you were up here. Oh! Have you been painting on it again?"

"On my violin? No, I've been playing on it."

"No! Painting on the picture of your old man. I think you have it too drawn out and thin. He's too hollow there under the cheek bone."

"Is he, Miss Critic? Well, thank your stars you're not."

"I know. I'm too fat." She rubbed her cheek until it was redder than ever.

"What are you painting your cheeks for? There's color enough on them as they are."

She made a little mouth at him. "I could paint your old man as well as that, I know."

"I know you could. You could paint him far better than that."

She laughed, quickly repentant. "I didn't say that to be horrid. I only said it for fun. I couldn't."

"And I know you could." He rose and stood without his crutch, looking down on her. "And you're not 'too long drawn out,' are you? See? You only come up to—about—here on me." He measured with his hand a little below his chin.

"I don't care. You're not so awfully tall."

"Very well, have it so. That only makes you the shorter."

"I tell you I don't care. You'd better stop staring at me, if I'm so little, and read your letter. The man's waiting for it. That's why I ran all the way up here." By this it may be seen that Betty had lost all her awe of the young soldier. Maybe it left her when he doffed his uniform. "Here's your crutch. Doesn't it hurt you to stand alone?" She reached him the despised prop.

"Hurt me to stand alone? No! I'm not a baby. Do you think I'm likely to grow up bow-legged?" he thundered, taking it from her hand without a thank you, and glaring down on her humorously. "You're a bit cruel to remind me of it. I'm going to walk with a cane hereafter, and next thing you know you'll see me stalking around without either."

"Why, Peter Junior! I'd be so proud of that crutch I wouldn't leave it off for anything! I'd always limp a little, even if I didn't use it. Cruel? I was complimenting you."

"Complimenting me? How?"

"By reminding you that you had been brave—and had been a soldier—and had been wounded for your country—and had been promoted—and—"

But Peter drowned her voice with uproarious laughter, and suddenly surprised himself as well as her by slipping his arm around her waist and stopping her lips with a kiss.

Betty was surprised but not shocked. She knew of no reason why Peter should not kiss her even though it was not his custom to treat her thus. In Betty's home, demonstrative expressions of affection were as natural as sunlight, and why should not Peter like her? Therefore it was Peter who was shocked, and embarrassed her with his sudden apology.

"I don't care if you did kiss me. You're just like my big brother—the same as Richard is—and he often used to kiss me." She was trying to set Peter at his ease. "And, anyway, I like you. Why, I supposed of course you liked me—only naturally not as much as I liked you."

“Oh, more! Much more!” he stammered tremblingly. He knew in his heart that there was a subtle difference, and that what he felt was not what she meant when she said, “I like you.” “I’m sure it is I who like you the most.”

“Oh, no, it isn’t! Why, you never even used to see me. And I—I used to gaze on you—and be so romantic! It was Richard who always saw me and played with me. He used to toss me up, and I would run away down the road to meet him. I wonder when he’s coming back! I wish he’d come. Why don’t you read your father’s letter? The man’s waiting, you know.”

“Ah, yes. And I suppose Dad’s waiting, too. I wonder why he wrote me when he can see me every day!”

“Well, read it. Don’t stand there looking at it and staring at me. Do you know how you look? You look as if it were a message from the king, saying: ‘You are remanded to the tower, and are to have your head struck off at sundown.’ That’s the way they did things in the olden days.” She turned to go.

“Stay here until I see if you are right.” He dropped on the divan and made room for her at his side.

“All right! That’s what I wanted to do, but I thought it wouldn’t be polite to be curious.”

“But you wouldn’t be polite anyway, you know, so you might as well stay. M-m-m. I’m remanded to the tower, sure enough. Father wants me to meet him in the director’s room as soon as banking hours are over. Fine old Dad! He wouldn’t think of infringing on banking hours for any private reasons unless the sky were falling, and even then he would save the bank papers first. See here—Betty—er—never mind. I’ll tell you another time.”

“Please tell me now! What is it? Something dreadful, Peter Junior?”

“I wasn’t thinking about this; it—it’s something else—”

“About what?”

“About you.”

“Oh, then it is no consequence. I want to hear what’s in the letter. Why did you tell me to stay if you weren’t going to tell me what’s in it?”

“Nothing. We have had a little difference of opinion, my father and I, and he evidently wants to settle it out of hand his way, by summoning me in this official manner to appear before him at the bank.”

“I know. He thinks you are idling away your time here trying to paint pictures, and he wishes to make a respectable banker of you.” She reached over and began picking the strings of his violin.

“You musn’t finger the strings of a violin that way.”

“Why not? I want to see if I can pick out ‘The Star Spangled Banner’ on it. I can on the flute, father’s old one; he lets me.”

“Because you’ll get them oily.”

She spread out her two firm little hands. “My fingers aren’t greasy!” she cried indignantly; “that’s pear juice on them.”

Peter Junior’s gravity turned to laughter. “Well, I don’t want pear juice on my strings. Wait, you rogue, I’m going to kiss you again.”

“No, you’re not, you old hobble-de-hoy. You can’t catch me.” When she was halfway down the stairs, she called back, “The man’s waiting.”

“Coward! Coward!” he called after her, “to run away from a poor old cripple and then call him names.” He thrust the letter into his pocket, and seizing his crutch began deliberately and carefully to descend the stairs, with grave, set face, not unlike his father’s.

“Catch, Peter Junior,” called Betty from the top of the pear tree as he passed down the garden path, and tossed him a pear which he caught, then another and another. “There! No, don’t eat them now. Put them in your desk, and next month they’ll be just as sweet!”

“Will they? Just like you? I’ll be even with you yet—when I catch you.”

“You’ll get pear juice on your strings. There are lots of nice girls in the village for you to kiss. They’ll do just as well as me.”

“Good girl. Good grammar. Good-by.” He waved his hand toward Betty, and turned to the waiting servant. “You go on and tell the Elder I’m coming right along,” he said, and hopped off down the road. It was only lately he had begun to take long walks or hops like this, with but one crutch, but he was growing frantic to be fairly on his two feet again. The doctor had told him he never would be, but he set his square chin, and decided that the doctor was wrong. More than ever to-day, with the new touch of little pear-stained fingers on his heart, he wanted to walk off like other men.

Now he tried to use his lame leg as much as possible. If only he might throw away the crutch and walk with a cane, it would be something gained. With one hand in his pocket he crushed his father’s letter into a small wad, then tossed it in the air and caught it awhile, then put it back in his pocket and hobbled on.

The atmosphere had the smoky appearance of the fall, and the sweet haze of Indian summer lay over the landscape, the horizon only faintly outlined through it. Peter Junior sniffed the air. He wondered if the forests in the north were afire. Golden maple leaves danced along on the path before him, whirled hither and thither by the light breeze, and the wild asters and goldenrod powdered his dark trousers with pollen as he brushed them in passing. All the world was lovely, and he appreciated it as he had never been able to do before. Bertrand’s influence had permeated his thoughts and widened thus his reach of happiness.

He entered the bank just at the closing hour, and the staid, faithful old clerks nodded to him as he passed through to the inner room, where he found his father awaiting him. He dropped wearily into a swivel chair before the great table and placed his crutch at his feet; wiping the perspiration from his forehead, he leaned forward, and rested his elbows on the table.

The young man’s wan look, for the walk had taxed his strength, reminded his father of the day he had brought the boy home wounded, and his face relaxed.

“You are tired, my son.”

“Oh, no. Not very. I have been more so.” Peter Junior smiled a disarming smile as he looked in his father’s face. “I’ve tramped many a mile on two sound feet when they were so numb from sheer weariness that I could not feel them or know what they were doing. What did you want to say to me, father?”

“Well, my son, we have different opinions, as you know, regarding your future.”

“I know, indeed.”

“And a father’s counsel is not to be lightly disposed of.”

“I have no intention of doing so, father.”

“No, no. But wait. You have been loitering the day at Mr. Ballard’s? Yes.”

“I have nothing else to do, father,—and—” Peter Junior’s smile again came to the rescue. “It isn’t as though I were in doubtful company—I—there are worse places here in the village where I might—where idle men waste their time.”

“Ah, yes. But they are not for you—not for you, my son.” The Elder smiled in his turn, and lifted his brows, then drew them down and looked keenly at his son. The afternoon sunlight streamed through the high western window and fell on the older man’s face, bringing it into strong relief against the dark oak paneling behind him, and as Peter Junior looked on his father he received his second revelation that day. He had not known before what a strong, fine old face his father’s was, and for the second time he surprised himself, when he cried out:—

“I tell you, father, you have a magnificent head! I’m going to make a portrait of you just as you are—some day.”

The Elder rose with an indignant, despairing downward motion of the hands and began pacing the floor, while Peter Junior threw off restraint and laughed aloud. The laughter freed his soul, but

it sadly irritated the Elder. He did not like unusual or unprecedented things, and Peter Junior was certainly not like himself, and was acting in an unprecedented manner.

“You have now regained a fair amount of strength and have reached an age when you should think seriously of what you are to do in life. As you know, it has always been my intention that you should take a place here and fit yourself for the responsibilities that are now mine, but which will some day devolve on you.”

Peter Junior raised his hand in protest, then dropped it. “I mean to be an artist, father.”

“Faugh! An artist? Look at your friend, Bertrand Ballard. What has he to live on? What will he have laid by for his old age? How has he managed to live all these years—he and his wife? Miserable hand-to-mouth existence! I’ll see my son trying to emulate him! You’ll be an artist? And how will you support a wife if you ever have one? You mean to marry some day?”

“I mean to marry Betty Ballard,” said Peter Junior, with a rugged set of his jaw.

Again the Elder made that despairing downward thrust with his open hands. “Take a wife who has nothing, and a career which brings in nothing, and live on what your father has amassed for you, and leave your sons nothing—a pretty way for you to carry on the work I have begun for you—to establish an honorable family—”

“Father, father, I mean to do all I can to please you. I’ll be always dutiful—and honorable—but you must leave me my manhood. You must allow me to choose my own path in life.”

The Elder paced the floor a few moments longer, then resumed his chair opposite his son, and, leaning back, looked across the table at his boy, meditatively, with half-closed eyes. At last he said, “We’ll take this matter to the Lord, and leave it in his hands.”

Then Peter Junior cried out upon him: “No, no, father; spare me that. It only means that you’ll state to the Lord what is your own way, and pray to have it, and then be more than ever convinced that it is the Lord’s way.”

“My son, my son!”

“It’s so, father. I’m willing to ask for guidance of the Lord, but I’m not willing to have you dictate to the Lord what—what I must do, and so whip me in line with the scourge of prayer.” Peter Junior paused, as he looked in his father’s face and saw the shocked and sorrowful expression there instead of the passionate retort he expected. “I am wrong to talk so, father; forgive me; but—have patience a little. God gave to man the power of choice, didn’t he?”

“Certainly. Through it all manner of evil came into the world.”

“And all manner of good, too. I—a man ought not to be merely an automaton, letting some one else always exercise that right for him. Surely the right of choice would never have been given us if it were not intended that each man should exercise it for himself. One who does not is good for nothing.”

“There is the command you forget; that of obedience to parents.”

“But how long—how long, father? Am I not man enough to choose for myself? Let me choose.”

Then the Elder leaned forward and faced his son as his son was facing him, both resting their elbows on the table and gazing straight into each other’s eyes; and the old man spoke first.

“My father founded this bank before I was born. He came from Scotland when he was but a lad, with his parents, and went to school and profited by his opportunities. He was of good family, as you know. When he was still a very young man, he entered a bank in the city as clerk, and received only ten dollars a week for his services, but he was a steady, good lad, and ambitious, and soon he moved higher—and higher. His father had taken up farming, and at his death, being an only son, he converted the farm, all but the homestead, which we still own, and which will be yours, into capital, and came to town and started this bank. When I was younger than you, my son, I went into the bank and stood at my father’s right hand, as I wish you—for your own sake—to do by me. We are a set race—a determined race, but we are not an insubordinate race, my son.”

Peter Junior was silent for a while; he felt himself being beaten. Then he made one more plea. "It is not that I am insubordinate father, but, as I see it, into each generation something enters, different from the preceding one. New elements are combined. In me there is that which my mother gave me."

"Your mother has always been a sweet woman, yielding to the judgment of her husband, as is the duty of a good wife."

"I know she was brought up and trained to think that her duty, but I doubt if you really know her heart. Did you ever try to know it? I don't believe you understood what I meant by the scourge of prayer. She would have known. She has lived all these years under that lash, even though it has been wielded by the hand of one she loves—by one who loves her." He paused a second time, arrested by his father's expression. At first it was that of one who is stunned, then it slowly changed to one of rage. For once the boy had broken through that wall of self-control in which the Elder encased himself. Slowly the Elder rose and leaned towering over his son across the table.

"I tell you that is a lie!" he shouted. "Your mother has never rebelled. She has been an obedient, docile woman. It is a lie!"

Peter Junior made no reply. He also rose, and taking up his crutch, turned toward the door. There he paused and looked back, with flashing eyes. His lip quivered, but he held himself quiet.

"Come back!" shouted his father.

"I have told you the truth, father." He still stood with his hand on the door.

"Has—has—your mother ever said anything to you to give you reason to insult me this way?"

"No, never. We can't talk reasonably now. Let me go, and I'll try to explain some other time."

"Explain now. There is no other time."

"Mother is sacred to me, father. I ought not to have dragged her into this discussion."

The Elder's lips trembled. He turned and walked to the window and stood a moment, silently looking out. At last he said in a low voice: "She is sacred to me also, my son."

Peter Junior went back to his seat, and waited a while, with his head in his hands; then he lifted his eyes to his father's face. "I can't help it. Now I've begun, I might as well tell the truth. I meant what I said when I spoke of the different element in me, and that it is from my mother. You gave me that mother. I know you love her, and you know that your will is her law, as you feel that it ought to be. But when I am with her, I feel something of a nature in her that is not yours. And why not? Why not, father? There is that of her in me that makes me know this, and that of you in me that makes me understand you. Even now, though you are not willing to give me my own way, it makes me understand that you are insisting on your way because you think it is for my good. But nothing can alter the fact that I have inherited from my mother tastes that are not yours, and that entitle me to my manhood's right of choice."

"Well, what is your choice, now that you know my wish?"

"I can't tell you yet, father. I must have more time. I only know what I think I would like to do."

"You wish to talk it over with your mother?"

"Yes."

"She will agree with me."

"Yes, no doubt; but it's only fair to tell her and ask her advice, especially if I decide to leave home."

The Elder caught his breath inwardly, but said no more. He recognized in the boy enough of himself to know that he had met in him a power of resistance equal to his own. He also knew what Peter Junior did not know, that his grandfather's removal to this country was an act of rebellion against the wishes of his father. It was a matter of family history he had thought best not to divulge.

CHAPTER VIII

MARY BALLARD'S DISCOVERY

Peter Junior's mind was quite made up to go his own way and leave home to study abroad, but first he would try to convert his father to his way of thinking. Then there was another thing to be done. Not to marry, of course; that, under present conditions, would never do; but to make sure of Betty, lest some one come and steal into her heart before his return.

After his talk with his father in the bank he lay long into the night, gazing at the shadowed tracery on his wall cast by the full harvest moon shining through the maple branches outside his window. The leaves had not all fallen, and in the light breeze they danced and quivered, and the branches swayed, and the shadows also swayed and danced delicately over the soft gray wall paper and the red-coated old soldier standing stiffly in his gold frame. Often in his waking dreams in after life he saw the moving shadows silently swaying and dancing over gray and red and gold, and often he tried to call them out from the past to banish things he would forget.

Long this night he lay planning and thinking. Should he speak to Betty and tell her he loved her? Should he only teach her to think of him, not with the frank liking of her girlhood, so well expressed to him that very day, but with the warm feeling which would cause her cheeks to redden when he spoke? Could he be sure of himself—to do this discreetly, or would he overstep the mark? He would wait and see what the next day would bring forth.

In the morning he discarded his crutch, as he had threatened, and walked out to the studio, using only a stout old blackthorn stick he had found one day when rummaging among a collection of odds and ends in the attic. He thought the stick was his father's and wondered why so interesting a walking stick—or staff; it could hardly be called a cane, he thought, because it was so large and oddly shaped—should be hidden away there. Had his father seen it he would have recognized it instantly as one that had belonged to his brother-in-law, Larry Kildene, and it would have been cut up and used for lighting fires. But it had been many years since the Elder had laid eyes on that knobbed and sturdy stick, which Larry had treasured as a rare thing in the new world, and a fine antique specimen of a genuine blackthorn. It had belonged to his great-grandfather in Ireland, and no doubt had done its part in cracking crowns.

Betty, kneading bread at a table before the kitchen window, spied Peter Junior limping wearily up the walk without his crutch, and ran to him, dusting the flour from her hands as she came.

"Lean on me. I won't get flour on your coat. What did you go without your crutch for? It's very silly of you."

He essayed a laugh, but it was a self-conscious one. "I'm not going to use a crutch all my lifetime; don't you think it. I'm very well off without, and almost myself again. I don't need to lean on you—but I will—just for fun." He put his arm about her and drew her to him.

"Stop, Peter Junior. Don't you see you're getting flour all over your clothes?"

"I like flour on my clothes. It will do for stiffening." He raised her hand and kissed her wrist where there was no flour.

"You're not leaning on me. You're just acting silly, and you can hardly walk, you're so tired! Coming all this way without your crutch. I think you're foolish."

"If you say anything more about that crutch, I'll throw away my cane too." He dropped down on the piazza and drew her to the step beside him.

"I must finish kneading the bread; I can't sit here. You rest in the rocker awhile before you go up to the studio. Father's up there. He came home late last night after we were all in bed." She returned to her work, and after a moment called to him through the open window. "There's going to be a nutting party to-morrow, and we want you to go. We're going out to Carter's grove; we've got permission. Every one's going."

Peter Junior rubbed the moisture from his hair and shook his head. He must get nearer her, but it was always the same thing; just a happy game, with no touch of sentiment—no more, he thought gloomily, than if she were his sister.

“What are you all going there for?”

“Why, nuts, goosey; didn’t I say we were going nutting?”

“I don’t happen to want nuts.” No, he wanted her to urge and coax him to go for her sake, but what could he say?

He left his seat, took the side path around to the kitchen door, and drew up a chair to the end of the table where she deftly manipulated the sweet-smelling dough, patting it, and pulling it, and turning it about until she was ready to put the shapely balls in the pans, holding them in her two firm little hands with a slight rolling motion as she slipped each loaf in its place. It had never occurred to Peter Junior that bread making was such an interesting process.

“Why do you fuss with it so? Why don’t you just dump it in the pan any old way? That’s the way I’d do.” But he loved to watch her pink-tipped fingers carefully shaping the loaves, nevertheless.

“Oh—because.”

“Good reason.”

“Well—the more you work it the better it is, just like everything else; and then—if you don’t make good-looking loaves, you’ll never have a handsome husband. Mother says so.” She tossed a stray lock from her eyes, and opening the oven door thrust in her arm. “My, but it’s hot! Why do you sit here in the heat? It’s a lot nicer on the porch in the rocker. Mother’s gone to town—and—”

“I’d rather sit here with you—thank you.” He spoke stiffly and waited. What could he say; what could he do next? She left him a moment and quickly returned with a cup of butter.

“You know—I’d stop and go out in the cool with you, Peter, but I must work this dough I have left into raised biscuit; and then I have to make a cake for to-morrow—and cookies—there’s something to do in this house, I tell you! How about to-morrow?”

“I don’t believe I’d better go. All the rest of the world will be there, and—”

“Only our little crowd. When I said everybody, you didn’t think I meant everybody in the whole world, did you? You know us all.”

“Do you want me to go? There’ll be enough others—”

She tossed her head and gave him a sidelong glance. “I always ask people to go when I don’t want them to.”

He rose at that and stood close to her side, and, stooping, looked in her eyes; and for the first time the color flamed up in her face because of him. “I say—do you want me to go?”

“No, I don’t.”

But the red he had brought into her cheeks intoxicated him with delight. Now he knew a thing to do. He seized her wrists and turned her away from the table and continued to look into her eyes. She twisted about, looking away from him, but the burning blush made even the little ear she turned toward him pink, and he loved it. His discretion was all gone. He loved her, and he would tell her now—now! She must hear it, and slipping his arm around her, he drew her away and out to the seat under the old silver-leaf poplar tree.

“You’re acting silly, Peter Junior,—and my bread will all spoil and get too light,—and my hands are all covered with flour, and—”

“And you’ll sit right here while I talk to you a bit, if the bread spoils and gets too light and everything burns to a cinder.” She started to run away from him, and his peremptory tone changed to pleading. “Please, Betty, dear! just hear me this far. I’m going away, Betty, and I love you. No, sit close and be my sweetheart. Dear, it isn’t the old thing. It’s love, and it’s what I want you to feel for me. I woke up yesterday, and found I loved you.” He held her closer and lifted her face to his. “You must wake up, too, Betty; we can’t play always. Say you’ll love me and be my wife—some day—won’t you, Betty?”

She drooped in his arms, hanging her head and looking down on her floury hands.

“Say it, Betty dear, won’t you?”

Her lip quivered. “I don’t want to be anybody’s wife—and, anyway—I liked you better the other way.”

“Why, Betty? Tell me why.”

“Because—lots of reasons. I must help mother—and I’m only seventeen, and—”

“Most eighteen, I know, because—”

“Well, anyway, mother says no girl of hers shall marry before she’s of age, and she says that means twenty-one, and—”

“That’s all right. I can wait. Kiss me, Betty.” But she was silent, with face turned from him. Again he lifted her face to his. “I say, kiss me, Betty. Just one? That was a stingy little kiss. You know I’m going away, and that is why I spoke to you now. I didn’t dare go without telling you this first. You’re so sweet, Betty, some one might find you out and love you—just as I have—only not so deeply in love with you—no one could—but some one might come and win you away from me, and so I must make sure that you will marry me when you are of age and I come back for you. Promise me.”

“Where?—why—Peter Junior! Where are you going?” Betty removed his arm from around her waist and slipped to her own end of the seat. There, with hands folded decorously in her lap, with heightened color and serious eyes, she looked shyly up at him. He had never seen her shy before. Always she had been merry and teasing, and his heart was proud that he had wrought such a miracle in her.

“I am going to Paris. I mean to be an artist.” He leaned toward her and would have taken her in his arms again, but she put his hands away.

“Will your father let you do that?” Her eyes widened with surprise, and the surprise nettled him.

“I don’t know. He’s thinking about it. Anyway, a man must decide for himself what his career will be, and if he won’t let me, I’ll earn the money and go without his letting me.”

“Wouldn’t that be the best way, anyway?”

“What do you mean? To go without his consent?”

“Of course not—goosey.” She laughed and was herself again, but he liked her better the other way. “To earn the money and then go. It—it—would be more—more as if you were in earnest.”

“My soul! Do you think I’m not in earnest? Do you think I’m not in love with you?”

Instantly she was serious and shy again. His heart leaped. He loved to feel his power over her thus. Still she tantalized him. “I’m not meaning about loving me. That’s not the question. I mean it would look more as if you were in earnest about becoming an artist.”

“No. The real question is, Do you love me? Will you marry me when I come back?” She was silent and he came nearer. “Say it. Say it. I must hear you say it before I leave.” Her lips trembled as if she were trying to form the words, and their eyes met.

“Yes—if—if—”

Then he caught her to him, and stopped her mouth with kisses. He did not know himself. He was a man he had never met the like of, and he gloried in himself. It seemed as if he heard bells ringing out in joy. Then he looked up and saw Mary Ballard’s eyes fixed on him.

“Peter Junior—what are you doing?” Her voice shook.

“I—I’m kissing Betty.”

“I see that.”

“We are to be married some day—and—”

“You are precipitate, Peter Junior.”

Then Betty did what every woman does when her lover is blamed, no matter how earnestly she may have resisted him before. She went completely over to his side and took his part.

“He’s going away, mother. He’s going away to be gone—perhaps for years; and I’ve—I’ve told him yes, mother,—so it isn’t his fault.” Then she turned and fled to her own room, and hid her flaming face in the pillow and wept.

“Sit here with me awhile, Peter Junior, and we’ll talk it all over,” said Mary.

He obeyed her, and looking squarely in her eyes, manfully told her his plans, and tried to make her feel as he felt, that no love like his had ever filled a man’s heart before. At last she sent him up to the studio to tell her husband, and she went in and finished Betty’s task, putting the bread—alas! too light by this time—in the oven, and shaping the raised biscuit which Betty had left half-finished.

Then she paused a moment to look out of the window down the path where the boys and little Janey would soon come tumbling home from school, hot and hungry. A tear slowly coursed down her cheek, and, following the curves, trembled on the tip of her chin. She brushed it away impatiently. Of course it had to come—that was what life must bring—but ah! not so soon—not so soon. Then she set about preparations for dinner without Betty’s help. That, too, was what it would mean—sometime—to go on doing things without Betty. She gave a little sigh, and at the instant an arm was slipped about her waist, and she turned to look in Bertrand’s eyes.

“Is it all right, Mary?”

“Why—yes—that is—if they’ll always love each other as we have. I think it ought not to be too definite an engagement, though, until his plans are more settled. What do you think?”

“You are right, no doubt. I’ll speak to him about that.” Then he kissed her warm, flushed cheek. “I declare, it makes me feel as Peter Junior feels again, to have this happen.”

“Ah, Bertrand! You never grew up—thank the Lord!” Then Mary laughed. After all, they had been happy, and why not Betty and Peter? Surely the young had their rights.

Bertrand climbed back to the studio where Peter Junior was pacing restlessly back and forth, and again they talked it all over, until the call came for dinner, when Peter was urged to stay, but would not. No, he would not see Betty again until he could have her quite to himself. So he limped away, feeling as if he were walking on air in spite of his halting gait, and Betty from her window watched him pass down the path and off along the grassy roadside. Then she went down to dinner, flushed and grave, but with shining eyes. Her father kissed her, but nothing was said, and the children thought nothing of it, for it was quite natural in the family to kiss Betty.

CHAPTER IX

THE BANKER'S POINT OF VIEW

There was no picnic and nutting party the next day, owing to a downpour of rain. Betty had time to think quietly over what had happened the day before and her mind misgave her. What was it that so filled her heart and mind? That so stirred her imagination? Was it romance or love? She wished she knew how other girls felt who had lovers. Was it easy or hard for them to say yes? Should a girl let her lover kiss her the way Peter Junior had done? Some of the questions which perplexed her she would have liked to ask her mother, but in spite of their charming intimacy she could not bring herself to speak of them. She wished she had a friend with a lover, and could talk it all over with her, but although she had girl friends, none of them had lovers, and to have one herself made her feel much older than any of them.

So Betty thought matters out for herself. Of course she liked Peter Junior—she had always liked him—and he was masterful—and she had always known she would marry a soldier—and one who had been wounded and been brave—that was the kind of a soldier to love. But she was more subdued than usual and sewed steadily on gingham aprons for Janey, making the buttonholes and binding them about the neck with contrasting stuff.

“Anyway, I’m glad there is no picnic to-day. The boys may eat up the cookies, and I didn’t get the cake made after all,” she said to her mother, as she lingered a moment in the kitchen and looked out of the window at the pouring rain. But she did not see the rain; she saw again a gray-clad youth limping down the path between the lilacs and away along the grassy roadside.

Well, what if she had said yes? It was all as it should be, according to her dreams, only—only—he had not allowed her to say what she had meant to say. She wished her mother had not happened to come just then before she could explain to Peter Junior; that it was “yes” only if when he came back he still wanted her and still loved her, and was sure he had not made a mistake about it. It was often so in books. Men went away, and when they returned, they found they no longer loved their sweethearts. If such a terrible thing should happen to her! Oh, dear! Or maybe he would be too honorable to say he no longer loved her, and would marry her in spite of it; and she would find out afterward, when it was too late, that he loved some one else; that would be very terrible, and they would be miserable all their lives.

“I don’t think I would let the boys eat up the cookies, dear; it may clear off by sundown, and be fine to-morrow, and they’ll be all as glad as to go to-day. You make your cake.”

“But Martha’s coming home to-morrow night, and I’d rather wait now until Saturday; that will be only one day longer, and it will be more fun with her along.” Betty spoke brightly and tried to make herself feel that no momentous thing had happened. She hated the constraint of it. “By that time Peter Junior will think that he can go, too. He’s so funny!” She laughed self-consciously, and carried the gingham aprons back to her room.

“Bless her dear little heart.” Mary Ballard understood.

Peter Junior also profited by the rainy morning. He had a long hour alone with his mother to tell her of his wish to go to Paris; and her way of receiving his news was a surprise to him. He had thought it would be a struggle and that he would have to argue with her, setting forth his hopes and plans, bringing her slowly to think with quiescence of their long separation: but no. She rose and began to pace the floor, and her eyes grew bright with eagerness.

“Oh, Peter, Peter!” She came and placed her two hands on his shoulders and gazed into his eyes. “Peter Junior, you are a boy after my own heart. You are going to be something worth while. I always knew you would. It is Bertrand Ballard who has waked you up, who has taught you to see that there is much outside of Leauvite for a man to do. I’m not objecting to those who live here and

have found their work here; it is only that you are different. Go! Go!—It is—has your father—have you asked his consent?”

“Oh, yes.”

“Has he given it?”

“I think he is considering it seriously.”

“Peter Junior, I hope you won’t go without it—as you went once, without mine.” Never before had she mentioned it to him, or recalled to his mind that terrible parting.

“Why not, mother? It would be as fair to him now as it was then to you. It would be fairer; for this is a question of progress, and then it was a matter of life and death.”

“Ah, that was different, I admit. But I never could retaliate, or seem to, even in the smallest thing. I don’t want him to suffer as I suffered.”

It was almost a cry for pity, and Peter Junior wondered in his heart at the depth of anguish she must have endured in those days, when he had thrust the thought of her opposition to one side as merely an obstacle overcome, and had felt the triumph of winning out in the contest, as one step toward independent manhood. Now, indeed, their viewpoints had changed. He felt almost a sense of pique that she had yielded so joyously and so suddenly, although confronted with the prospect of a long separation from him. Did she love him less than in the past? Had his former disregard of her wishes lessened even a trifle her mother love for him?

“I’m glad you can take the thought of my going as you do, mother.” He spoke coldly, as an only son may, but he was to be excused. He was less spoiled than most only sons.

“In what way, my son?”

“Why—in being glad to have me go—instead of feeling as you did then.”

“Glad? Glad to have you go? It isn’t that, dear. Understand me. I’m sorry I spoke of that old time. It was only to spare your father. You see we look at things differently. He loves to have us follow out his plans. It is almost—death to him to have to give up; and with me—it was not then as it is now. I don’t like to think or speak of that time.”

“Don’t, mother, don’t!” cried Peter, contritely.

“But I must to make you see this as you should. It was love for you then that made me cling to you, and want to hold you back from going; just the same it is love for you now that makes me want you to go out and find your right place in the world. I was letting you go then to be shot at—to suffer fatigue, and cold, and imprisonment, who could know, perhaps to be cruelly killed—and I did not believe in war. I suppose your father was the nobler in his way of thinking, but I could not see it his way. Angels from heaven couldn’t have made me believe it right; but it’s over. Now I know your life will be made broader by going, and you’ll have scope, at least, to know what you really wish to do with yourself and what you are worth, as you would not have, to sit down in your father’s bank, although you would be safer there, no doubt. But you went through all the temptations of the army safely, and I have no fear for you now, dear, no fear.”

Peter Junior’s heart melted. He took his mother in his arms and stroked her beautiful white hair. “I love you, mother, dear,” was all he could say. Should he tell her of Betty now? The question died in his heart. It was too much. He would be all hers for a little, nor intrude the new love that she might think divided his heart. He returned to the question of his father’s consent. “Mother, what shall I do if he will not give it?”

“Wait. Try to be patient and do what he wishes. It may help him to yield in the end.”

“Never! I know Dad better than that. He will only think all the more that he is in the right, and that I have come to my senses. He never takes any viewpoint but his own.” His mother was silent. Never would she open her lips against her husband. “I say, mother, naturally I would rather go with his consent, but if he won’t give it—How long must a man be obedient just for the sake of obedience? Does such bondage never end? Am I not of age?”

“I will speak to him. Wait and see. Talk it over with him again to-day after banking hours.”

“I—I—have something I must—must do to-day.” He was thinking he would go out to the Ballards’ in spite of the rain.

The dinner hour passed without constraint. In these days Peter Junior would not allow the long silences to occur that used often to cast a gloom over the meals in his boyhood. He knew that in this way his mother would sadly miss him. It was the Elder’s way to keep his thoughts for the most part to himself, and especially when there was an issue of importance before him. It was supposed that his wife could not take an interest in matters of business, or in things of interest to men, so silence was the rule when they were alone.

This time Peter Junior mentioned the topic of the wonderful new railroad that was being pushed across the plains and through the unexplored desert to the Pacific.

“The mere thought of it is inspiring,” said Hester.

“How so?” queried the Elder, with a lift of his brows. He deprecated any thought connecting sentiment with achievement. Sentiment was of the heart and only hindered achievement, which was purely of the brain.

“It’s just the wonder of it. Think of the two great oceans being brought so near together! Only two weeks apart! Don’t they estimate that the time to cross will be only two weeks?”

“Yes, mother, and we have those splendid old pioneers who made the first trail across the desert to thank for its being possible. It isn’t the capitalists who have done this. It’s the ones who had faith in themselves and dared the dangers and the hardships. They are the ones I honor.”

“They never went for love of humanity. It was mere love of wandering and migratory instinct,” said his father, grimly.

Peter Junior laughed merrily. “What did old grandfather Craigmile pull up and come over to this country for? They had to cross in sailing vessels then and take weeks for the journey.”

“Progress, my son, progress. Your grandfather had the idea of establishing his family in honorable business over here, and he did it.”

“Well, I say these people who have been crossing the plains and crawling over the desert behind ox teams in ‘prairie schooners’ for the last twenty or thirty years, braving all the dangers of the unknown, have really paved the way for progress and civilization. The railroad is being laid along the trail they made. Do you know Richard’s out there at the end of the line—nearly?”

“He would be likely to be. Roving boy! What’s he doing there?”

“Poor boy! He almost died in that terrible southern prison. He was the mere shadow of himself when he came home,” said Hester.

“The young men of the present day have little use for beaten paths and safe ways. I offered him a position in the bank, but no—he must go to Scotland first to make the acquaintance of our aunts. If he had been satisfied with that! But no, again, he must go to Ireland on a fool’s errand to learn something of his father.” The Elder paused and bit his lip, and a vein stood out on his forehead. “He’s never seen fit to write me of late.”

“Of course such a big scheme as this road across the plains would appeal to a man like Richard. He’s doing very well, father. I wouldn’t be disturbed about him.”

“Humph! I might as well be disturbed about the course of the Wisconsin River. I might as well worry over the rush of a cataract. The lad has no stability.”

“He never fails to write to me, and I must say that he was considered the most dependable man in the regiment.”

“What is he doing? I should like to see the boy again.” Hester looked across at her son with a warm, loving light in her eyes.

“I don’t know exactly, but it’s something worth while, and calls for lots of energy. He says they are striking out into the dust and alkali now—right into the desert.”

“And doesn’t he say a word about when he is coming back?”

“Not a word, mother. He really has no home, you know. He says Scotland has no opening for him, and he has no one to depend on but himself.”

“He has relatives who are fairly well to do in Ireland.”

The Elder frowned. “So I’ve heard, and my aunts in Scotland talked of making him their heir, when I was last there.”

“He knows that, father, but he says he’s not one to stand round waiting for two old women to die. He says they’re fine, decorous old ladies, too, who made a lot of him. I warrant they’d hold up their hands in horror if they knew what a rough life he’s leading now.”

“How rough, my son? I wish he’d make up his mind to come home.”

“There! I told him this is his home; just as much as it is mine. I’ll write him you said that, mother.”

“Indeed, yes. Bless the boy!”

The Elder looked at his wife and lifted his brows, a sign that it was time the meal should close, and she rose instantly. It was her habit never to rise until the Elder gave the sign. Peter Junior walked down the length of the hall at his father’s side.

“What Richard really wished to do was what I mentioned to you yesterday for myself. He wanted to go to Paris and study, but after visiting his great-aunts he saw that it would be too much. He would not allow them to take from their small income to help him through, so he gave it up for the time being; but if he keeps on as he is, it is my opinion he may go yet. He’s making good money. Then we could be there together.”

The Elder made no reply, but stooped and drew on his india-rubber overshoes,—stamping into them,—and then got himself into his raincoat with sundry liftings and hunchings of his shoulders. Peter Junior stood by waiting, if haply some sort of sign might be given that his remark had been heeded, but his father only carefully adjusted his hat and walked away in the rain, setting his feet down stubbornly at each step, and holding his umbrella as if it were a banner of righteousness. The younger man’s face flushed, and he turned from the door angrily; then he looked to see his mother’s eyes fixed on him sadly.

“At least he might treat me with common decency. He need not be rude, even if I am his son.” He thought he detected accusation of himself in his mother’s gaze and resented it.

“Be patient, dear.”

“Oh, mother! Patient, patient! What have you got by being patient all these years?”

“Peace of mind, my son.”

“Mother—”

“Try to take your father’s view of this matter. Have you any idea how hard he has worked all his life, and always with the thought of you and your advancement, and welfare? Why, Peter Junior, he is bound up in you. He expected you would one day stand at his side, his mainstay and help and comfort in his business.”

“Then it wasn’t for me; it was for himself that he has worked and built up the bank. It’s his bank, and his wife, and his son, and his ‘Tower of Babel that he has builded,’ and now he wants me to bury myself in it and worship at his idolatry.”

“Hush, Peter. I don’t like to rebuke you, but I must. You can twist facts about and see them in a wrong light, but the truth remains that he has loved you tenderly—always. I know his heart better than you—better than he. It is only that he thinks the line he has taken a lifetime to lay out for you is the best. He is as sure of it as that the days follow each other. He sees only futility in the way you would go. I have no doubt his heart is sore over it at this moment, and that he is grieving in a way that would shock you, could you comprehend it.”

“Enough said, mother, enough said. I’ll try to be fair.”

He went to his room and stood looking out at the rain-washed earth and the falling leaves. The sky was heavy and drab. He thought of Betty and her picnic and of how gay and sweet she was, and

how altogether desirable, and the thought wrought a change in his spirit. He went downstairs and kissed his mother; then he, too, put on his rubber overshoes and shook himself into his raincoat and carefully adjusted his hat and his umbrella. Then with the assistance of the old blackthorn stick he walked away in the rain, limping, it is true, but nevertheless a younger, sturdier edition of the man who had passed out before him.

He found Betty alone as he had hoped, for Mary Ballard had gone to drive her husband to the station. Bertrand was thinking of opening a studio in the city, at his wife's earnest solicitation, for she thought him buried there in their village. As for the children—they were still in school.

Thus it came about that Peter Junior spent the rest of that day with Betty in her father's studio. He told Betty all his plans. He made love to her and cajoled her, and was happy indeed. He had a winsome way, and he made her say she loved him—more than once or twice—and his heart was satisfied.

"We'll be married just as soon as I return from Paris, and you'll not miss me so much until then?"

"Oh, no."

"Ah—but—but I hope you will—you know."

"Of course I shall! What would you suppose?"

"But you said no."

"Naturally! Didn't you wish me to say that?"

"I wanted you to tell the truth."

"Well, I did."

"There it is again! I'm afraid you don't really love me."

She tilted her head on one side and looked at him a moment. "Would you like me to say I don't want you to go to Paris?"

"Not that, exactly; but all the time I'm gone I shall be longing for you."

"I should hope so! It would be pretty bad if you didn't."

"Now you see what I mean about you. I want you to be longing for me all the time, until I return."

"All right. I'll cry my eyes out, and I'll keep writing for you to come home."

"Oh, come now! Tell me what you will do all the time."

"Oh, lots of things. I'll paint pictures, too, and—I'll write—and help mother just as I do now; and I'll study art without going to Paris."

"Will you, you rogue! I'd marry you first and take you with me if it were possible, and you should study in Paris, too—that is, if you wished to."

"Wouldn't it be wonderful! But I don't know—I believe I'd rather write than paint."

"I believe I'd rather have you. They say there are no really great women artists. It isn't in the woman's nature. They haven't the strength. Oh, they have the delicacy and all that; it's something else they lack."

"Humph! It's rather nice to have us lacking in one thing and another, isn't it? It gives you men something to do to discover and fill in the lacks."

"I know one little lady who lacks in nothing but years."

Betty looked out of the window and down into the yard. "There is mother driving in. Let's go down and have cookies and milk. I'm sure you need cookies and milk."

"I'll need anything you say."

"Very well, then, you'll need patience if ever you marry me."

"I know that well enough. Stop a moment. Kiss me before we go down." He caught her in his arms, but she slipped away.

"No, I won't. You've had enough kisses. I'll always give you one when you come, hereafter, and one when you go away, but no more."

“Then I shall come very often.” He laughed and leaned upon her instead of using his stick, as they slowly descended.

Mary Ballard was chilled after her long drive in the rain, and Betty made her tea. Then, after a pleasant hour of chat and encouragement from the two sweet women, Peter Junior left them, promising to go to the picnic and nutting party on Saturday. It would surely be pleasant, for the sky was already clearing. Yes, truly a glad heart brings pleasant prognostications.

CHAPTER X

THE NUTTING PARTY

Peter Junior made no attempt the next day to speak further to his father about his plans. It seemed to him better that he should wait until his wise mother had talked the matter over with the Elder. Although he put in most of the day at the studio, painting, he saw very little of Betty and thought she was avoiding him out of girlish coquetry, but she was only very busy. Martha was coming home and everything must be as clean as wax. Martha was such a tidy housekeeper that she would see the least lack and set to work to remedy it, and that Betty could not abide. In these days Martha's coming marked a semimonthly event in the home, for since completing her course at the high school she had been teaching in the city. Bertrand would return with her, and then all would have to be talked over,—just what he had decided to do, and why.

In the evening a surprise awaited the whole household, for Martha came, accompanied not only by her father, but also by a young professor in the same school where she taught. Mary Ballard greeted him most kindly, but she felt things were happening too rapidly in her family. Jamie and Bobby watched the young man covertly yet eagerly, taking note of his every movement and intonation. Was he one to be emulated or avoided? Only little Janey was quite unabashed by him, and this lightened his embarrassment greatly and helped him to the ease of manner he strove to establish.

She led him out to the sweet-apple tree, and introduced him to the calf and the bantams, and invited him to go with them nutting the next day. "We're all going in a great, big picnic wagon. Everybody's going and we'll have just lots of fun." And he accepted, provided she would sit beside him all the way.

Bobby decided at this point that he also would befriend the young man. "If you're going to sit beside her all the way, you'll have to be lively. She never sits in one place more than two minutes. You'll have to sit on papa's other knee for a while, and then you'll have to sit on Peter Junior's."

"That will be interesting, anyway. Who's Peter Junior?"

"Oh, he's a man. He comes to see us a lot."

"He's the son of Elder Craigmile," explained Martha.

"Is he going, too, Betty?"

"Yes. The whole crowd are going. It will be fun. I'm glad now it rained Thursday, for the Deans didn't want to postpone it till to-morrow, and then, when it rained, Mrs. Dean said it would be too wet to try to have it yesterday; and now we have you. I wanted all the time to wait until you came home."

That night, when Martha went to their room, Betty followed her, and after closing the door tightly she threw her arms around her sister's neck.

"Oh, Martha, Martha, dear! Tell me all about him. Why didn't you let us know? I came near having on my old blue gingham. What if I had? He's awfully nice looking. Is he in love with you? Tell me all about it. Does he make love to you? Oh, Martha! It's so romantic for you to have a lover!"

"Hush, Betty, some one will hear you. Of course he doesn't make love to me!"

"Why?"

"I wouldn't let him."

"Martha! Why not? Do you think it's bad to let a young man make love to you?"

"Betty! You mustn't talk so loud. Everything sounds so through this house. It would mortify me to death."

"What would mortify you to death: to have him make love to you or to have someone hear me?"

"Betty, dear!"

"Well, tell me all about him—please! Why did he come out with you?"

"You shouldn't always be thinking about love-making—and—such things, Betty, dear. He just came out in the most natural way, just because he—he loves the country, and he was talking to me

about it one day and said he'd like to come out some Friday with me—just about asked me to invite him. So when father called at the school yesterday for me, I introduced them, and he said the same thing to father, and of course father invited him over again, and—and—so he's here. That's all there is to it."

"I bet it isn't. How long have you known him?"

"Why, ever since I've been in the school, naturally."

"What does he teach?"

"He has higher Latin and beginners' Greek, and then he has charge of the main room when the principal goes out."

Betty pondered a little, sitting on the floor in front of her sister. "You have such a lovely way of doing your hair. Is that the way to do hair nowadays—with two long curls hanging down from one side of the coil? You wind one side around the back knot, and then you pin the other up and let the ends hang down in two long curls, don't you? I'm going to try mine that way; may I?"

"Of course, darling! I'll help you."

"What's his name, Martha? I couldn't quite catch it, and I did not want to let him know I thought it queer, so wouldn't ask over."

"His name is Lucien Thurbyfil. It's not so queer, Betty."

"Oh, you pronounce it T'urbyfil, just as if there were no 'h' in it. You know I thought father said Mr. Tubfull—or something like that, when he introduced him to mother, and that was why mother looked at him in such an odd way."

The two girls laughed merrily. "Betty, what if you hadn't been a dear, and had called him that! And he's so very correct!"

"Oh, is he? Then I'll try it to-morrow and we'll see what he'll do."

"Don't you dare! I'd be so ashamed I'd sink right through the floor. He'd think we'd been making fun of him."

"Then I'll wait until we are out in the woods, for I'd hate to have you make a hole in the floor by sinking through it."

"Betty! You'll be good to-morrow, won't you, dear?"

"Good? Am I not always good? Didn't I scrub and bake and put flowers all over the ugly what-not in the corner of the parlor, and get the grease spot out of the dining room rug that Jamie stepped butter into—and all for you—without any thought of any Mr. Tubfull or any one but you? All day long I've been doing it."

"Of course you did, and it was perfectly sweet; and the flowers and mother looked so dear—and Janey's hands were clean—I looked to see. You know usually they are so dirty. I knew you'd been busy; but Betty, dear, you won't be mischievous to-morrow, will you? He's our guest, you know, and you never were bashful, not as much as you really ought to be, and we can't treat strangers just as we do—well—people we have always known, like Peter Junior. They wouldn't understand it."

But the admonition seemed to be lost, for Betty's thoughts were wandering from the point. "Hasn't he ever—ever—made love to you?" Martha was washing her face and neck at the washstand in the corner, and now she turned a face very rosy, possibly with scrubbing, and threw water over her naughty little sister. "Well, hasn't he ever put his arm around you or—or anything?"

"I wouldn't let a man do that."

"Not if you were engaged?"

"Of course not! That wouldn't be a nice way to do."

"Shouldn't you let a man kiss you or—or—put his arm around you—or anything—even when he's trying to get engaged to you?"

"Of course not, Betty, dear. You're asking very silly questions. I'm going to bed."

"Well, but they do in books. He did in 'Jane Eyre,' don't you remember? And she was proud of it—and pretended not to be—and very much touched, and treasured his every look in her heart. And

in the books they always kiss their lovers. How can Mr. Thurbyfil ever be your lover, if you never let him even put his arm around you?"

"Betty, Betty, come to bed. He isn't my lover and he doesn't want to be and we aren't in books, and you are getting too old to be so silly."

Then Betty slowly disrobed and bathed her sweet limbs and at last crept in beside her sister. Surely she had not done right. She had let Peter Junior put his arm around her and kiss her, and that even before they were engaged; and all yesterday afternoon he had held her hand whenever she came near, and he had followed her about and had kissed her a great many times. Her cheeks burned with shame in the darkness, not that she had allowed this, but that she had not been as bashful as she ought. But how could she be bashful without pretending?

"Martha," she said at last, "you are so sweet and pretty, if I were Mr. Thurbyfil, I'd put my arm around you anyway, and make love to you."

Then Martha drew Betty close and gave her a sleepy kiss. "No you wouldn't, dear," she murmured, and soon the two were peacefully sleeping, Betty's troubles quite forgotten. Still, when morning came, she did not confide to her sister anything about Peter Junior, and she even whispered to her mother not to mention a word of the affair to any one.

At breakfast Jamie and Bobby were turbulent with delight. All outings were a joy to them, no matter how often they came. Martha was neat and rosy and gay. Lucien Thurbyfil wanted to help her by wiping the dishes, but she sent him out to the sweet-apple tree with a basket, enjoining him to bring only the mellow ones. "Be sure to get enough. We're all going, father and mother and all."

"It's very nice of your people to make room for me on the wagon."

"And it's nice of you to go."

"I see Peter Junior. He's coming," shouted Bobby, from the top of the sweet-apple tree.

"Who does he go with?" asked Martha.

"With us. He always does," said Betty. "I wonder why his mother and the Elder never go out for any fun, the way you and father do!"

"The Elder always has to be at the bank, I suppose," said Mary Ballard, "and she wouldn't go without him. Did you put in the salt and pepper for the eggs, dear?"

"Yes, mother. I'm glad father isn't a banker."

"It takes a man of more ability than I to be a banker," said Bertrand, laughing, albeit with concealed pride.

"We don't care if it does, Dad," said Jamie, patronizingly. "When I get through the high school, I'm going to hire out to the bank." He seized the lunch basket and marched manfully out to the wagon.

"I thought Peter Junior always went with Clara Dean. He did when I left," said Martha, in a low voice to Betty, as they filled bottles with raspberry shrub, and with cream for the coffee. "Did you tie strings on the spoons, dear? They'll get mixed with the Walters' if you don't. You remember theirs are just like ours."

"Oh, I forgot. Why, he likes Clara a lot, of course, but I guess they just naturally expected him to go with us. They and the Walters have a wagon together, anyway, and they wouldn't have room. We have one all to ourselves. Hello, Peter Junior! Mr. Thurbyfil, this is Mr. Junior."

"Happy to meet you, Mr. Junior," said the correct Mr. Thurbyfil. The boys laughed uproariously, and the rest all smiled, except Betty, who was grave and really seemed somewhat embarrassed.

"What is it?" she asked.

"Mr. Thurbyfil, this is Mr. Craigmile," said Martha. "You introduced him as Mr. Junior, Betty."

"I didn't! Well, that's because I'm bashful. Come on, everybody, mother's in." So they all climbed into the wagon and began to find their places.

"Oh, father, have you the matches? The bottles are on the kitchen table," exclaimed Martha.

“Don’t get down, Mr. Ballard,” said Lucien. “I’ll get them. It would never do to forget the bottles. Now, where’s the little girl who was to ride beside me?” and Janey crawled across the hay and settled herself at her new friend’s side. “Now I think we are beautifully arranged,” for Martha was on his other side.

“Very well, we’re off,” and Bertrand gathered up the reins and they started.

“There they are. There’s the other wagon,” shouted Bobby. “We ought to have a flag to wave.”

Then Lucien, the correct, startled the party by putting his two fingers in his mouth and whistling shrilly.

“They have such a load I wish Clara could ride with us,” said Betty. “Peter Junior, won’t you get out and fetch her?”

So they all stopped and there were greetings and introductions and much laughing and joking, and Peter Junior obediently helped Clara Dean down and into the Ballards’ wagon.

“Clara, Mr. Thurbyfil can whistle as loud as a train, through his fingers, he can. Do it, Mr. Thurbyfil,” said Bobby.

“Oh, I can do that,” said Peter Junior, not to be outdone by the stranger, and they all tried it. Bertrand and his wife, settled comfortably on the high seat in front, had their own pleasure together and paid no heed to the noisy crew behind them.

What a day! Autumn leaves and hazy distances, soft breezes and sunlight, and miles of level road skirting woods and open fields where the pumpkins lay yellow among the shocks of corn, and where the fence corners were filled with flaming sumac, with goldenrod and purple asters adding their softer coloring.

It was a good eight miles to Carter’s woods, but they bordered the river where the bluffs were not so high, and it would be possible to build a fire on the river bank with perfect safety. Bertrand had brought roasting ears from his patch of sweet corn, and as soon as they arrived at their chosen grove, he and Mary leisurely turned their attention to the preparing of the lunch with Mrs. Dean and Mrs. Walters, leaving to the young people the gathering of the nuts.

Mrs. Dean, a slight, wiry woman, who acted and talked easily and unceasingly, spread out a fresh linen cloth and laid a stone on each corner to hold it down, and then looked into each lunch basket in turn, to acquaint herself with its contents.

“I see you brought cake and cookies and jam, Mrs. Ballard, besides all the corn and cream—you always do too much, and all your own work to look after, too. Well, I brought a lot of ham sandwiches and that brown bread your husband likes so much. I always feel so proud when Mr. Ballard praises anything I do; he’s so clever it makes me feel as if I were really able to do something. And you’re so clever too. I don’t know how it is some folks seem to have all the brains, and then there’s others—good enough—but there! As I tell Mr. Dean, you can’t tell why it is. Now where are the spoons? Every one brings their own, of course; yes, here are yours, Mrs. Walters. It’s good of you to think of that sweet corn, Mr. Ballard.—Oh, he’s gone away; well, anyway, we’re having a lot more than we can eat, and all so good and tempting. I hope Mr. Dean won’t overeat himself; he’s just a boy at a picnic, I always have to remind him—How?”

“Did you bring the cups for the coffee?” It was Mrs. Walters who interrupted the flow of Mrs. Dean’s eloquence. She was portly and inclined to brevity, which made her a good companion for Mrs. Dean.

“I had such a time with my jell this summer, and now this fall my grape jell’s just as bad. This is all running over the glasses. There, I’ll set it on this paper. I do hate to see a clean cloth all spotted with jell, even if it is a picnic when people think it doesn’t make any difference. I see Martha has a friend. Well, that’s nice. I wish Clara cared more for company; but, there, as I tell Mr. Dean—Oh, yes! the cups. Clara, where are the cups? Oh, she’s gone. Well, I’m sure they’re in that willow basket. I told Clara to pack towels around them good. I do hate to see cups all nicked up; yes, here they are. It’s good of you to always tend the coffee, Mrs. Walters; you know just how to make it. I tell Mr.

Dean nobody ever makes coffee like you can at a picnic. Now, if it's ready, I think everything else is; well, it soon will be with such a fire, and the corn's not done, anyway. Do you think the sun'll get round so as to shine on the table? I see it's creeping this way pretty fast, and they're all so scattered over the woods there's no telling when we will get every one here to eat. I see another tablecloth in your basket, Mrs. Ballard. If you'll be good enough to just hold that corner, we can cover everything up good, so, and then I'll walk about a bit and call them all together." And the kindly lady stepped briskly off through the woods, still talking, while Mrs. Ballard and Mrs. Walters sat themselves down in the shade and quietly watched the coffee and chatted.

It was past the noon hour, and the air was drowsy and still. The voices and laughter of the nut gatherers came back to them from the deeper woods in the distance, and the crackling of the fire where Bertrand attended to the roasting of the corn near by, and the gentle sound of the lapping water on the river bank came to them out of the stillness.

"I wonder if Mr. Walters tied the horses good!" said his wife. "Seems as if one's got loose. Don't you hear a horse galloping?"

"They're all there eating," said Mary, rising and looking about. "Some one's coming, away off there over the bluff; see?"

"I wonder, now! My, but he rides well. He must be coming here. I hope there's nothing the matter. It looks like—it might be Peter Junior, only he's here already."

"It's—it's—no, it can't be—it is! It's—Bertrand, Bertrand! Why, it's Richard!" cried Mary Ballard, as the horseman came toward them, loping smoothly along under the trees, now in the sunlight and now in the shadow. He leaped from the saddle, and, throwing the rein over a knotted limb, walked rapidly toward them, holding out a hand to each, as Bertrand and Mary hurried forward.

"I couldn't let you good folks have one of these fine old times without me."

"Why, when did you come? Oh, Richard! It's good to see you again," said Mary.

"I came this morning. I went up to my uncle's and then to your house and found you all away, and learned that you were here and my twin with you, so here I am. How are the children? All grown up?"

"Almost. Come and sit down and give an account of yourself to Mary, while I try to get hold of the rest," said Bertrand.

"Mrs. Dean has gone for them, father. Mrs. Walters, the coffee's all right; come and sit down here and let's visit until the others come. You remember Richard Kildene, Mrs. Walters?"

"Since he was a baby, but it's been so long since I've seen you, Richard. I don't believe I'd have known you unless for your likeness to Peter Junior. You look stronger than he now. Redder and browner."

"I ought to. I've been in the open air and sun for weeks. I'm only here now by chance."

"A happy chance for us, Richard. Where have you been of late?" asked Bertrand.

"Out on the plains—riding and keeping a gang of men under control, for the most part, and pushing the work as rapidly as possible." He tossed back his hair with the old movement Mary remembered so well. "Tell me about the children, Martha and Betty; both grown up? Or still ready to play with a comrade?"

"They're all here to-day. Martha's teaching in the city, but Betty's at home helping me, as always. The boys are getting such big fellows, and little Janey's as sweet as all the rest."

"There! That's Betty's laugh, I know. I'd recognize it if I heard it out on the plains. I have, sometimes—when a homesick fit gets hold of me out under the stars, when the noise of the camp has subsided. A good deal of that work is done by the very refuse of humanity, you know, a mighty tough lot."

"And you like that sort of thing, Richard?" asked Mary. "I thought when you went to your people in Scotland, you might be leading a very different kind of life by now."

"I thought so, too, then; but I guess for some reasons this is best. Still, I couldn't resist stealing a couple of days to run up here and see you all. I got off a carload of supplies yesterday from Chicago,

and then I wired back to the end of the line that I'd be two days later myself. No wonder I followed you out here. I couldn't afford to waste the precious hours. I say! That's Betty again! I'll find them and say you're hungry, shall I?"

"Oh, they're coming now. I see Martha's pink dress, and there's Betty in green over there."

But Richard was gone, striding over the fallen leaves toward the spot of green which was Betty's gingham dress. And Betty, spying him, forgot she was grown up. She ran toward him with outstretched arms, as of old—only—just as he reached her, she drew back and a wave of red suffused her face. She gave him one hand instead of both, and called to Peter Junior to hurry.

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